Valentin Naumescu
Raluca Moldovan
Anamaria Florina Caloianu
(Editors)

PERSPECTIVES OF THE EU' S EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Proceedings of the third edition of the international conference

The European Union's External Relations and the Global Order (EUXGLOB)

Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
Faculty of European Studies
Nov 9-10, 2023

3/2023

Presa Universitară Clujeană

VALENTIN NAUMESCU
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Foreword

The third edition of the EUXGLOB international conference, already a cherished academic tradition, was held at the Faculty of European Studies, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj Napoca, on November 9-10, 2023, its main theme being the perspectives of the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood – a challenging and opportune topic, given the turmoil still engulfing the region as a result of Russia's 2022 invasion against Ukraine.

The conference, organised in a hybrid format over two days packed full of interesting discussions, presentations and side events, boasted another successful partnership with the think tank Initiative for European Democratic Culture (ICDE) and brought together more than sixty reputed academics, researchers, doctoral and MA students from the US, the UK, Germany, Belgium, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria, Armenia and Romania. We were honoured to have His Excellency Dorin Recean, the Prime Minister of Moldova, address the opening plenary via Zoom, alongside the then head of the European Commission Delegation in Romania, HE Ramona Chiriac.

The conference included three notable side events: a roundtable of academics, military and policy experts on the topic of geopolitics and the impact of the new technologies in the Black Sea region, organised within the Horizon Europe REMIT (Reignite Multilateralism via Technology) 2023-2027 project, the award ceremony for the ICDE annual "European Romania" prize and the traditional EUXGLOB-ICDE roundtable of experts at the end of the conference.

This volume brings before the public a selection of thought-provoking and very diverse chapters based on the presentations their authors delivered during the conference, on topics ranging from international relations and geopolitics to energy and military security, all attempting to shed light, from multiple perspectives, on a region that has found itself pushed to the centre of European political debates for the past two years. Several of the chapters in the present volume have endeavoured to formulate a series of scenarios for the short and mid-term future of the region and we are certain that they will make for a fascinating read, especially given the current climate of insecurity and conflict in the middle of an unprecedented election year.

We are confident that the readers will find the book a useful guide for better understanding the multiple facets of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood today and discover some answers to the many difficult questions confronting the European and regional political arena at present. And while those answers may not carry an optimistic tone, we do hope they will invite further reflection on the part of the reader, at least until the next edition of the EUXGLOB international conference, to be held in December 2024, when we are looking forward to seeing old friends and new colleagues join us in Cluj, for another remarkable academic event.

The Editors
April 2024

EUXGLOB III International conference

Perspectives of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood

Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj, Faculty of European Studies

EUXGLOB Centre in partnership with ICDE

9-10 November 2023

Conference Programme

Thursday, 9 November

9:00-9:45 Opening session (plenary), Robert Schuman Room

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

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Professor Valentin Naumescu, Faculty of European Studies, UBB Cluj, Director of the EUXGLOB Centre – *Introductory remarks to the 3rd edition of EUXGLOB*

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*

9:45 – 12:00 Panel 1, Robert Schuman Room

Chair: Professor Sergiu Mișcoiu, UBB Cluj

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

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Assistant Professor Oleksandr Rusnak, Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, Ukraine, *Basic Principles of Post-War Reconstruction of Ukraine*

Associate Professor Khatuna Chapichadze, Georgian Technical University (GTU); San Diego State University (SDSU), *The European Perspective for Georgia – Why a Different Path from Ukraine and Moldova?*

Dr. Ioana Elena Secu, The European Institute of Romania, Bucharest, *The new geopolitics of the Union – perspectives on the Eastern Partnership and the necessity of the 3 Wills (The Will to Resist; The Will to Stay United; The Will to Be Engaged)*

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Chair: Assoc. prof. Raluca Moldovan, UBB Cluj

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87539897581?pwd=4sDKDFWCJOgcYvMMHiieJ8t0ayMmeY.1

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Discussions

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Chair: Professor Valentin Naumescu, UBB Cluj

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

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15:00-16:00 **Keynote speech** and discussions, Professor Corneliu Bjola, Oxford University – *Quo Vadis EU? The Franco-German Four-Speed Plan: Prospects and Challenges*

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Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

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Speakers:

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16:50-17:00 Dr. Olga Chiriac, Project Europe, Head of Engagement at the Irregular Warfare Initiative, USA, associated researcher at the Centre for Strategic Studies in Bucharest.

17:00-17:10 Dan Cîmpean, Director of Romanian National Cyber Security Directorate, Representative of Romania in European Cybersecurity Competence Centre Governing Board, Bucharest.

17:10-17:20 Assoc. prof. Răzvan Grigoraș, Dean of the Faculty of Intelligence Studies, "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest.

17:20-17:30 Lt. Col. Professor Paul Tudorache**,** Vice-Dean of the Military Science Faculty at the "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy, Sibiu.

17:30-17:40 Associate Professor Silviu Nate, Lucian Blaga University Sibiu, Director of the Global Studies Centre, Sibiu.

17:40-17:50 Professor Mircea Boscoianu, Transilvania University Brașov, Senior researcher at the National Institute for Aerospace Research "Elie Carafoli" Bucharest.

17:50-18:00 Dr. Oana Poiană Marchiș, Researcher at the Institute of International Relations and Area Studies, UBB Cluj, REMIT researcher.

18:00-18:10 Lt. Col. Curtis D. Cordon, Air, Space & Nuclear Policy Advisor, US Military Delegation to the NATO Military Committee, Brussels.

18:10-18:50 Free discussions

18:50-19:00 Conclusions

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19:00-20.30 Dinner, the Pyramid Restaurant

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Friday, 10 November

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Chair: Associate Professor Silviu Nate, ULB Sibiu

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

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Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87539897581?pwd=4sDKDFWCJOgcYvMMHiieJ8t0ayMmeY.1

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Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

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Discussions.

*

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Chair: Professor Gabriela Ciot, UBB Cluj

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87539897581?pwd=4sDKDFWCJOgcYvMMHiieJ8t0ayMmeY.1

Assistant Professor Renata Kunert-Milcarz, University of Wroclaw, *Prospects for European integration of Moldova in the light of Russian aggression against Ukraine*

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*

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Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

The ICDE Board decision announcement – Professor Valentin Naumescu, ICDE President
Laudatio – Dr. Laura Ghibu, Sweden, ICDE member
Acceptance speech – Ms. Oana Gheorghiu and Ms. Carmen Uscatu, ADV founders
Discussions

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Chair: Florina Anamaria Caloianu, UBB Cluj

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82681463773?pwd=Jr1nmHaG53NikBGxLDNT10SGgDdXcc.1

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Zoom link: https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

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Chair: Associate professor Raluca Moldovan, UBB Cluj

Zoom link: https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87539897581?pwd=4sDKDFWCJOgcYvMMHiieJ8t0ayMmeY.1

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Marius-George Ghiță, PhD candidate, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, *The impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on the EU enlargement policy*

Discussions

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Chair: Associate Professor Silviu Nate, ULB Sibiu

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

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Professor Bruce A. Pagel, Arizona State University, *The War in Ukraine: An Operational Perspective, 2023*

Assistant Professor Luke M. Perez, Arizona State University, *American Strategic Cultures and Foreign Policy Uncertainty Toward Ukraine*

Assistant Professor Matthew Slaboch, Arizona State University, *Émigrés, Exiles, and the War in Ukraine*

Discussions

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Chair: Claudiu Aldea, UBB Cluj

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87539897581?pwd=4sDKDFWCJOgcYvMMHiieJ8t0ayMmeY.1

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Dr. Nicolae Țîbrigan, “Ion I.C. Brătianu” Institute of Political Science and International Relations Bucharest, *Resilience in the New Media Literacy Index for Eastern Europe 2023*

Despina Popescu, PhD candidate, UBB Cluj, *Russia's Increasingly Aggressive Counterbalancing of the West throughout the 21st Century and the Weaponization of Narratives*

Diana Petruț, PhD candidate, UBB Cluj, *Moldova's Accession to the EU: Opportunities and Challenges*

Eugeniusz Kuznicow-Wyszyńsk, PhD candidate, University of Warsaw, *Ukraine's path to EU membership: overcoming obstacles and aspirations*

Discussions

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17:00-19:00 Round table, Robert Schuman Room

The Regional Impact of the Great Powers' Changing Relations, with the participation of ICDE think tank experts and guests.

Zoom link:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6872621035?pwd=V3J6VmE2M0tmVHhFVURFUThTTm8vQT09

Speakers:

Professor Valentin Naumescu, President of ICDE (moderator)

Associate Professor Silviu Nate

Associate Professor Raluca Moldovan

Professor Sergiu Mișcoiu

Curtis D. Cordon

Andrei Enghiș

Dr. Dorin Popescu

Mr. Romeo Stavăr-Vergea

Associate Professor Natalia Stercul

Professor Gabriela Ciot

All participants and students may ask questions or have interventions within the allocated time of the event.

19:00 Conclusions & end of EUXGLOB III

Part one.

Keynote addresses

The EU's Enlargement Policy

Ramona Chiriac, Head of European Commission Representation in Bucharest
Mara Roman-Bănescu, Deputy head, the European Commission Representation in Bucharest

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to participate in today's conference dedicated to the Neighbourhood of the European Union, organised by the Faculty of European Studies together with the Initiative for European Democratic Culture.

In the current extremely complex and volatile regional and geopolitical developments, today's discussion is an important contribution of Romanian academia to the ongoing reflection on the future of the European Union in the context of the enlargement process, which has more than ever a key strategic angle.

Your event also comes very timely, one day after the Commission proposed the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and the granting of candidate country status to Georgia, as part of the 2023 enlargement package presented by President von der Leyen.

I congratulate Mr. Prime Minister Recean for this important milestone, for Moldova's reform ambition, which confirm without a doubt its perspective to become part of the European family.

Accession to the European Union is and will remain a merit-based process. In other words, it is in the hands of aspiring states to determine the pace of implementing the necessary reforms to advance in this process. Moldova's determination when engaging on this reform path is recognized in the Commission's assessment and proposal to start accession negotiations.

Enlargement: history meets geopolitics

The EU's enlargement policy is more than ever a geostrategic investment in long-term peace, stability, and security of the whole of our continent. As President von der Leyen said during her State of the Union address, "Europe is responding to the call of history, and we are working further on completing our Union."

It is clearly in Europe's strategic and security interests to complete our Union, and we cannot afford to leave our fellow Europeans behind." Past enlargements have shown the enormous benefits both for the accession countries and the EU. It is thus a process beneficial to all of us.

Enlargement package

This year the Commission enlargement package consists of a Communication and 10 reports, covering for the first time as enlargement countries Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. In particular, the report focuses on the progress in the implementation of fundamental reforms, as well as on providing clear guidance on the reform priorities ahead.

The enlargement countries have a historic window of opportunity to strongly bind their future to the European Union.

Ukraine, despite the on-going war, has created a powerful reform momentum. Moldova has also further advanced on reforms and demonstrated its capacity to make progress in aligning with the EU acquis. In Georgia too we have seen positive new dynamics and an increasing commitment to address all the Opinion's priorities.

As to the , the EU accession process advanced at different paces. We aim to open accession negotiations on the Fundamentals cluster with Albania and North Macedonia by the end of the year.

The Commission proposed yesterday a new Western Balkans Growth Plan that offers the region further access to the EU single market and therefore advantages of EU membership ahead of accession to the European Union.

This approach should act as catalyst, substantially accelerating the accession process and the related reform process and economic growth of the Western Balkans, provided that the fundamental and specific socio-economic reforms take place.

EU and Moldova, Romania and Moldova

The Commission will provide continued support to candidate countries in their efforts taking forward the needed reforms.

This is also valid for Moldova as we continue to support its economic recovery and development including through financial cooperation. Under the Eastern Partnership Economic and Investment Plan – published back in 2021 - we have already mobilized EUR 900 million in grants, loans and blending operations for Moldova. This has been achieved through cooperation with European banks, and development partners from EU Member States.

Moreover, the Moldova Support Platform which was set-up to support Moldova offsetting the impact of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, has played a significant role in assisting the country to get stronger and more resilient. Through our joint support, since 2022, Moldova has received EUR 200 million in grants and EUR 500 million in loans.

This year's priorities of the Platform are energy efficiency and investing in Moldova's infrastructure. In this context, we plan to mobilize EUR 10 million under the Economic and Investment Plan to support the Residential Energy Efficiency Fund.

And, as I mentioned energy, Romania was a key player in providing support to Moldova once the war started, and in particular support to cope with power black-outs, surging energy prices and supply shortages. We remain grateful to Romania for this crucial aid.

In record time, powered by extraordinary determination and cooperation, Ukraine and Moldova synchronised last year their electricity grids with the European one, to enhance their energy security. And the Iasi-Ungheni pipeline, enabling gas flowing from Romania to keep Moldovan households warm and the economy going, was chiefly enabled by EU funds.

This is true European solidarity in action! It shows the strategically vital benefits of stability and security entailed by the EU association and enlargement processes.

Ladies and gentlemen

The complex path towards EU membership, beyond reforms and financial aid, also fosters a key ingredient of EU unity- which is strengthened people-to-people contacts, building bridges, learning from each other and learning about each other.

Romania and Moldova have come a long way already - as they share not only our language, but also history, connections between the people and a strong sense of solidarity.

Russia's War and Europe's Changing Security Order: Time for a "Greater European Council"?

Ulrich Schneckener and Sebastian Schäffer

Abstract. After the destruction of the European security architecture by the unprovoked and unjustified full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, a new format of cooperation in Europe is needed. While reflecting on different proposals made over after February 2022 and the concept of a European Political Community (EPC) introduced by French President Emmanuel Macron, we explore the concept of a Greater European Council (GEC) as a new way forward. We believe that, especially with the historic decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, the institutions in Brussels need to change their policies and routine procedures. The EU's decision to pursue a wider Europe approach with the EPC can only be seen as the first step in providing the necessary answers to the changing geopolitical and security environment. With this article, we want to contribute to the question of how to build and institutionalise stronger ties between EU and Non-EU states and also shed light on the enlargement issue.

Keywords: European Political Community, European security, Greater European Council, NATO

Introduction

After more than two years of Russia's invasion, it remains open how and when the war aggression against Ukraine might end. Some short- and mid-term consequences for Europe's security architecture, however, can already be acknowledged: First, as long as Putin stays in power, European security will no longer be organised with or without, but presumably against Russia. The emphasis within the European and trans-Atlantic security institutions will be much more on "confrontational" than on cooperative security which is characterized by enhancing deterrence and defence capabilities as well as by a sustained sanction regime against Putin's Russia.

Second, one can observe a strong revival of NATO, most notably due to the new membership of Finland (April 2023) and Sweden (March 2024). Both Nordic countries will certainly strengthen NATO's defence in the Baltic Sea region and the European pillar within the Alliance. In addition, both agreed with Denmark and Norway in March 2023 to strengthen the Nordic defence cooperation by an integrated air force structure.[1] By the same token, Denmark has abolished its opt-out regarding the EU's defence and security policy, which will foster security cooperation within the EU and between the EU and NATO.

Third, on the downside, for the time being, the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) remains largely paralysed and its assumed role as a pan-European security forum has further deteriorated. The international mission members of the

[1] Reuters, "Nordic Countries Plan Joint Air Defence to Counter Russian Threat," March 24, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/nordic-countries-plan-joint-air-defence-counter-russian-threat-2023-03-24/.

Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine (since 2014) had to be evacuated after February 24, 2022, and the SMM suspended its regular reporting activities by March 7, 2022. How and in which capacity the OSCE and its instruments might be reactivated will largely depend on the outcome of the war, on a possible cease-fire or peace settlement and, most importantly, on future developments in Russia.

Fourth, after the EU's decision to grant the candidate status to Ukraine, Moldova (both in June 2022) and to Georgia (December 2023) both the EU's Eastern neighbourhood and enlargement policy will need a fundamental make-over. In particular, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in its current shape cannot be continued since the EU saw this format always as an alternative path to membership. So far, it is not clear what a new EU Eastern Europe policy may look like. While expanding the EU's political, financial, and humanitarian support for Ukraine, there is still the risk that pro-Kremlin political forces in Moldova and Georgia will further polarize the societies and obstruct any rapprochement towards Brussels. However, despite the new momentum, a rapid intake of the three EaP countries (so-called "Associated Trio") and, eventually, of the six Western Balkan states (WB6) will hardly find consensus among the EU-27.

In other words: No matter how the war ends, the EU can hardly continue with its incremental and largely technocratic approach regarding enlargement while still lacking a viable plan for the new emerging order. The key challenge has been pointed out by Timothy Garton Ash when he emphasized that the EU needs to act strategically by setting long-term goals, but also be flexible in methods.[2] Therefore, innovative designs and interim solutions are utterly needed.

Indeed, for a couple of years, different approaches have been circulating among policy-makers, think tankers and academics, referring inter alia to the concept of a multi-speed Europe, gradual and sectorial integration, inventing categories such as "associated members" (without voting rights), or advocating for a reformed, renamed and expanded European Economic Area (EEA).[3] Additionally, several new fora have been established, among them the Three-Seas-Initiative of twelve EU members (since 2015) and (macro-)regional formats (like the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region – EUSDR, or the Black Sea Synergy - BSS), which include both EU and non-EU Member States, offering new platforms for cooperation, but, so far, showing limited output or ordering potential.

In this contribution, we assess the most recent initiative for bringing EU and Non-EU members closer together: the European Political Community (EPC) which met for the first summit in Prague (6 October 2022), based on a proposal by the French President Emmanuel Macron. However, we see a number of shortcomings in this new emerging European club. The crucial question seems to be whether or not it can live up to the political and security challenges ahead and how it could be transformed into a building block for a new order. We see different options of how the format can develop and expand, thereby, we in particular advocate the idea

[2] ECFR, "Annual Council Meeting 2022 – Zeitenwende for Europe: Building a New Global Order in Times of Unpeace," May 18, 2022, https://ecfr.eu/event/annual-council-meeting-2022/.

[3] European Stability Initiative, "European Stability Initiative (ESI) Newsletter 5/2022," June 16, 2022, https://www.esiweb.org/newsletter/ukraine-europe-and-second-treaty-rome.

of a Greater European Council as a much better way forward for responding to both, the gradual integration of non-EU states and the re-ordering of Europe due to the changing security environment.

Macron's proposal and related initiatives

No doubt, Ukraine's application (February 28, 2022) for EU membership and the swift return of the EU's questionnaires (April 17 and May 9, 2022) under dramatic war conditions exerted considerable political and moral pressure on the Brussels institutions to review their policies and routine procedures, which led to several different proposals.

When presenting the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on May 9, 2022, Emmanuel Macron floated his idea of an EPC complementing existing EU structures. As he put it, the new format should "not prejudge future accession to the EU" and "not be closed to those who have left the EU."[4] Such an EU-plus body could be used for "political and security cooperation, cooperation in the energy sector, in transport, investments, infrastructures, the free movement of persons and in particular of our youth." [5]

Macron's initiative for a two-tier Europe was first met with skepticism or rejection from (potential) candidate countries who feared a new "waiting room" which would allow the EU to avoid decisions and postpone enlargement processes. Such reservations have been echoed not least by Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelensky.[6] The problem seemed to be not so much the message, but the messenger. Traditionally, France had been more reluctant toward EU enlargement than others, advocating deepening European integration before widening. In particular, Macron's personal role in blocking the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia reinforced this image. Not surprising that his idea raised suspicions in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe to create an "alternative path" to full EU membership. Moreover, names and symbols also matter for attracting acceptance. The term European Political Community (EPC) reminded observers and commentators of the failure of another EPC project in the early days of European integration (1954).[7]

Next to Macron's proposal, other initiatives were tabled aiming at (gradually) opening up EU institutions for would-be-members or extending EU structures to a new multilateral platform. An example of the first, rather piecemeal approach has been the Non-paper on EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy (May 2022) by the Austrian government. The paper advocates the gradual integration of applicant states into different policy areas and calls for new mechanisms in respective Council meetings, allowing them to "be present in EU decision-shaping and, at a later stage, decision-making". The second option has been reflected by the

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[4] European Council, "Six Months of French Presidency at the Service of Europe," June 30, 2022, https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/media/vpcffzwo/main-res ults-of-the-french-presidency.pdf.

[5] Robert Levis, "What Is the European Political Community?," *European Movement Ireland*, October 16, 2022, https://www.europeanmovement.ie/what-is-the-european-political-community/.

[6] Benjamin Rios, Rick Noack, Mathias Bellack, "Macron's European Political Community Brings in Skeptical Ukraine and UK," *The Washington Post*, October 6, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/06/european-political-community-macron-zelensky/.

[7] Richard T. Griffiths, *Europe's First Constitution: The European Political Community, 1952-1954*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

interventions of Italy's former Prime Minister, Enrico Letta, and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel. Letta, former leader of the Partito Democratico, called for the establishment of a European Confederation[8], comprising 36 members, i.e., the EU-27 plus the six Western Balkan states as well as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Meetings of the European Council would then be followed by the summit of the Confederation's leader in the same place and under the auspices of the president of the European Council. For Letta, the agenda should include issues such as security, climate change, trade and development, but may also involve the goal of a common free trade zone.[9] Going a step further, Michel launched the idea of a European Geopolitical Community that potentially "extends from Reykjavik to Baku or Yerevan, from Oslo to Ankara"[10] Like Letta and Macron, he stressed the need to implement such a forum as soon as possible in order to respond to the "critical moment in history". The aim would be to "forge convergence and deepen operational cooperation" across the continent. The heads of state and government of the participating countries would meet at least twice a year linked to EU summits, while the foreign ministers should meet on a regular basis within the context of the EU Foreign Affairs Council. For Michel, foreign and security policy would be the major area of cooperation, but socio-economic issues could also be addressed by involving and opening up other council configurations.[11] The operational realization of these ideas gained momentum when in June 2022 the European Council, building on both Macron's and Michel's input, agreed to launch a European Political Community as a new platform for political coordination and strategic debate across the European continent. Under the heading of "Wider Europe", the EU leaders underlined that "such a framework will not replace existing EU policies and instruments, notably enlargement, and will fully respect the EU's decision-making autonomy."[12] With this, they tried to calm down the fears of EU candidate states but at the same time respond to concerns within the Brussels institutions (and some EU Member States) that a new format might interfere with the EU's political machinery.

EPC Summits and the prospects of the format

Hosted by the then Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, the inaugural meeting of the EPC was held in Prague on 6 October 2022, followed by the informal meeting of the European Council a day later. In total, more than 40 heads of state or government grouped together on the "family photo", comprising 26 EU members plus 17 non-EU members (as well

[8] Marie Moulin, "European Confederation. A Much-maligned Concept. Policy Brief," Jacques Delors Institute, Paris, June 1, 2022, https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/confederation-europeenne-histoire-dune-idee-malmenee/.

[9] Franz Hornig, "EU Und Ukraine: Enrico Letta Über Die Idee Eines Neuen Staatenbundes" (EU and Ukraine: Enrico Letta on the idea of a new confederation of states), *Der Spiegel*, June 18, 2022, https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/eu-und-ukraine-enrico-letta-ueber-die-idee-eines-neuen-staatenbundes-a-1d63a96d-8572-46f8-a2d1-551ca3989b51.

[10] European Council, "Speech by President Charles Michel at the Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee," May 18, 2022, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2022/05/18/discours-du-president-charles-michel-lors-de-la-session-pleniere-du-comite-economique-et-social-europeen/.

[11] *Ibidem.*

[12] European Council, "European Council Meeting (23 and 24 June 2022) – Conclusions," June 24, 2022, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57442/2022-06-2324-euco-conclusions-en.pdf.

as the European Commission president and European Council president). This well-orchestrated image of unity and preparedness to cooperate – despite severe bilateral conflicts among a number of states – became the most important media message to the outside world. Some leaders such as the Belgian prime minister, Alexander De Croo, pointed out that for obvious reasons two states, namely Russia and Belarus, have not been invited to this event, which shows their degree of isolation. Instead, the participants wanted to demonstrate their solidarity during times of common challenges for the European continent caused by Russia's war of aggression. They affirmed their support for Ukraine and pledged in particular to enhance energy and security cooperation. Most significantly, Ukraine's president Zelensky addressed the EPC summit via video, while the prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, attended in person.

The meeting was mainly used for informal bi- and multilateral talks and roundtables on peace and security, as well as on energy, climate, and economy. There was also a general agreement to continue and deepen discussions on issues of common interest in the future, such as critical infrastructure, cyber security, sub-regional security (e.g. Black Sea, Baltic Sea), and opportunities for young people.[13] However, substantial results have been rather limited: One of the iconic pictures presented the quadrilateral meeting of Macron and Michel talking to the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. They agreed to establish an EU observer mission following the renewed eruption of hostilities between both countries in September 2022.

Generally, most participants praised the high degree of informality and flexibility of the format with no fixed agendas and no need to take decisions. The EPC has been deliberately designed as a bi-annual platform for leaders to engage in open and equal dialogue, hence the lack of a formal declaration.[14]

As Macron proposed, the bi-annual format also indicates an alternation between EU and non-EU states in terms of hosting the EPC summits. Thus, on 1 June 2023, around 50 heads of state or government, involving 27 EU members and 18 non-EU members (as well as the president of the European Council, the president of the European Commission, the president of the European Parliament and the high representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) attended the second EPC Summit, on invitation of the Republic of Moldova. EU and non-EU leaders showed once again a sign of unity as the event took place just a few kilometres from the Ukrainian border. During the second EPC Summit, the discussions primarily focused on strengthening infrastructure security among the European continent, as well as energy resilience and climate action. At this summit, Ukraine's President Zelensky was able to attend the event in person and expressed gratitude to Moldova for their hospitality towards Ukrainian refugees. He emphasized the unity between Ukraine and the Moldovan people. Even though the host nation has not recognized the independence of Kosovo, delegates from Kosovo were able to attend the summit. Other meetings were held concerning Kosovo-Serbia relations with

[13] Suzana Elena Anghel, "Outcome of the European Political Community and European Council Meetings in Prague on 6-7 October 2022," The European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), October 11, 2022, https://epthinktank.eu/2022/10/11/outcome-of-the-european-political-community-and-european-council-meetings-in-prague-on-6-7-october-2022/.
[14] *Ibidem.*

President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Olaf Scholz to address the current tensions between both countries. Some heads of state also used this opportunity to bolster bilateral cooperation in Europe with, for instance, another round of talks between the two presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The third EPC meeting, hosted by the Spanish EU presidency, took place in Grenada (October 5, 2023) focusing on digitalization, energy and climate, migration as well as on multilateralism and geopolitics. However, the format displayed already a number of shortcomings: Not only important participants were missing (including once again Turkish president Erdoğan and Azerbaijan's President Aliyev), but also in terms of substance the meeting was widely seen as a disappointment, it even ended without an official press statement by the Spanish host.

For the follow-up process, the crucial question will be whether the new EPC will have a future at all,[15] whether it remains another "talking shop" searching for a mission or whether it can develop a more meaningful role in terms of "club governance" complementing EU structures.[16] The "club" concept refers to more or less formalized settings by which a number of states try to address common problems and provides some kind of global or regional governance by enhancing cooperation and providing concrete initiatives, programmes or funds. Club governance can work within already established institutions and international organisations, for example as an alliance or lobby group for particular interests, be it within the EU or the United Nations. Most often, however, club governance operates outside such fora and centres around certain policy areas. Such clubs, in some cases called "coalitions of the willing", may still be linked to formal institutions and bring new perspectives and proposals to the table, which can be taken up by formal decision-making bodies such as the European institutions. Using this club notion, there are different options to constitute alternatives, but elements could also be combined or used for an incremental process of further institutionalization. The first option would simply be to keep the very low profile of the EPC as a bi-annual platform with a flexible, non-binding agenda, whereby the rotating host states play a facilitating and a note-taker role. Second, the EPC evolves into a more formalized format with a permanent secretariat, an agreed working programme, final conclusions and ministerial meetings for key policy areas (e.g. foreign policy, security, energy) underneath the summit meetings. Third, the EPC leads to a new Pan-European organisation with its own institutional bodies, programmes, and procedures, and seeks its role between the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the EU. Fourth, the EPC will be transformed into an "EU-plus club", which would imply that the platform develops strong institutional ties with the EU structures, in particular with the European Council.

While the first two options will fall short regarding the political and security challenges for Europe as a whole, the third option seems to be very unlikely and also not really attractive,

[15] Lorenzo Scazzieri, "Can the European Political Community Survive?," Centre for European Reform, October 17, 2023, https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/insight_LS_EPC_17.10.23.pdf.
[16] Ulrich Schneckener, "The Opportunities and Limits of Global Governance by Clubs," *SWP Comment 2009/C 22, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)*, September 15, 2009, https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/opportunities-and-limits-of-global-governance-by-clubs.

as it would simply add a new actor that overlaps to a great degree with the existing organisations. The fourth option, however, could provide a bold step forward: That is why we advocate turning the EPC into a Greater European Council (GEC).

A Greater European Council as the way forward?

A Greater European Council, building on the EPC, would essentially be an extended, albeit differently institutionalised, version of the European Council. However, in order to make such an arrangement viable and useful for both non-EU states and EU members, a lot depends on the institutional design, composition, mandate and resources of the new body. Co-chaired by the president of the European Council and a non-EU member (on a rotating basis), the GEC would gather four times a year at the level of heads of state and government, directly before or after regular European Council summits. In addition, the GEC format may meet more often at the level of foreign ministers and, if required, make use of other European Council configurations or thematic working groups. The European Commission should also be involved at all levels as an observer and facilitator. Based on consensus, single states must not be able to block the progress of other countries, allowing for enhanced cooperation (similar to Art. 20 of the EU Treaty and Title III of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU).

GEC membership would be an offer for all 44 EPC participants, however, there could be some countries (e.g. UK or Switzerland) which hesitate to (re-)connect too closely to the EU institutions. In any case, one could assume that the WB6, the Associated Trio, as well as the non-EU countries of the European Economic Area will take part since they are already engaged with EU structures and policies in one way or another. In other words, the GEC might start with a smaller group of European states than the EPC but remain open to observers or those who join later. The underlying assumption would be that the GEC would develop a political dynamic of its own so that eventually everyone would want to be present and heard. The political costs of not sitting at the table would be much higher.

As with the EPC, for the functioning of such an inter-governmental body, it will be crucial that all actors avoid instrumentalizing the format constantly for their narrow bilateral conflict issues since this would paralyze all discussions and undermine any decisions. This does not only refer to the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo but also to the tensions between Greece, Cyprus and Türkiye or Bulgaria and North Macedonia, just to name a few. These issues should not be on the agenda of the GEC, however, as shown at the EPC summit, GEC meetings might also offer opportunities for bilateral negotiations as side events.

The GEC would have a much broader, trans-regional and international role to play. The GEC would go beyond informal dialogue among leaders and should be more than a consultative forum on European and international affairs. Like the European Council, the GEC would adopt an agenda and need to work on general conclusions, common positions, and joint actions. In other words, the GEC – unlike the current EPC – would prepare and take decisions, which would require political commitment by all parties. Admittedly, reaching a broad consensus might be very ambitious from time to time, as it is already within the EU-27. The risk of a lowest common denominator cannot be denied or underestimated. Still, regular discussions and exchanges of views within the GEC may over time show some socialization

effects and foster trust-building among the great majority of participants. For example, as Russia's war underlines, shaping, coordinating, and implementing economic and fiscal sanctions will be of key interest for most participants, the same is true for fighting cyberattacks or digital disinformation or for responding to pandemics or energy crises. While the focus of the GEC should be on European and trans-regional security issues, the wider agenda should include trade, social, mobility, energy, climate and environmental questions or cross-cutting issues such as technology, research, and innovation.

For taking joint actions, different programmes or funds could be mobilized, managed by the European Commission, and supervised by a joint board of EU and non-EU members. Depending on the relationship of the participating members with the EU, different funding sources would be available. This could be reformed EU instruments (such as an updated Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument), matching of EU and non-EU funds or governmental resources from different parties allocated to specific issues of common concern.

To summarize the key advantages: those who are not or not yet EU members would have a real say and a seat at the table of this new multilateral body. Non-EU-members (candidate and non-candidate states) get the opportunity to bring in their concerns and ideas to shape European debates in general, and a new Wider Europe policy in particular, long before becoming a full EU member, if at all. It would be directly connected to the European Council & Foreign Affairs Council, use other thematic Council configurations, and would therefore also allow for a smooth transition to EU membership. It would also function as both an enabler for those willing to join and an alternative for those who do not. If the GEC arrives at a common position or a joint action, this would not only increase the legitimacy of the adopted policy but presumably the level of commitment by all states. The GEC format may also serve as a testing ground for potential EU initiatives, strengthening the EU's regional and global clout and not least filling the notion of strategic autonomy with life and concrete actions.

The GEC and the enlargement question

One of the key challenges for the EU in the mid-term future will be if the stagnation of the integration process resulting from the de-coupling of deepening and widening can be solved. With the Lisbon Treaty, the "Method Monnet" or Ever Closer Union has been quietly buried. The possibility to leave the EU and also to transfer competencies back to the Member States has made this logic obsolete. Furthermore, by making enlargement conditional upon deeper integration steps (which would almost certainly imply a major treaty reform), the necessity for internal consolidation has been instrumentalized to postpone the accession of the remaining countries in the Western Balkans, even though they were promised a future in the EU (once all Copenhagen Criteria are fulfilled) two decades ago. With the now added (potential) candidate countries from the Associated Trio, the pressure, and expectations to keep the promises on the side of the EU and its Member States have only increased. Of course, lack of reform or democratic backsliding in possible future Member States cannot be ignored, however, a more credible process and better sequencing needs to be established.

The concept of "staged accession" to the EU, which has been proposed by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), points in this direction. The rationale behind this approach is gaining traction as a means of reinvigorating and maintaining the motivation for Western Balkan states to progress in their integration efforts and overcome obstacles in their accession prospects.[17]

The proposed accession regime consists of four stages: Initial Accession, Intermediate Accession, New Member State, and Conventional Membership. In the Initial Accession stage, funding is at 50% of Conventional Membership, and there is policy dialogue or observer status with the institutions. In the Intermediate Accession stage, funding increases to 75% of the last stage and there is more substantial participation in policies and institutions. In the New Member State stage, funding is at 100% of Conventional Membership and there is full participation in EU policies, including the Generalized Qualified Majority (QM) voting rights in the Council (no veto powers) and the possibility of acceding to the Schengen Area and Eurozone. In the last phase – Conventional membership – full participation in all policies and institutions is granted.[18]

The authors of this proposal point out that in order to successfully implement the mentioned concept, it is necessary to supplement it with a firm EU policy focused on resolving bilateral disputes and issues of statehood in the region.[19]

A more radical approach was proposed in the same year, where among others the late former Vice-Chancellor of Austria, Erhard Busek, argued for the immediate accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU.[20] Taking into account the EU and Western Balkans' common history and culture, as well as geographical proximity, economic ties, and mutual challenges like security and climate change, it is often overlooked that the EU is literally surrounding the WB6. According to their policy paper, "Brussels should rather treat this weak flank of Europe as their inner courtyard instead of their backyard and integrate them immediately."[21] For ten years, since Croatia's accession on 1 July 2013, not much has changed in the relationship with the remaining countries. Instead of taking stock of what is missing, it is argued that a "learning-by-doing" approach would also lead to political accountability in those countries.

It is however rather unlikely that either a gradual step-by-step process or a radical change will lead to more rapid integration of the new (potential) candidate countries. One of the major challenges for EU enlargement is the possibility for single Member States to block the process at various points: granting the candidate status, opening, and closing the negotiations of different chapters, and, finally, the ratification of the accession treaty. While the latter should remain part of the process, the steps before should be taken to the supranational

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[17] Michael Emerson, Maja Lazarević, Steven Blockmans, Stefan Subotić, "A Template for Staged Accession to the EU," Centre for European Policy Studies, October 1, 2021, https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/a-template-for-staged-accession-to-the-eu/.
[18] *Ibidem.*
[19] *Ibidem.*
[20] Erhard Busek, Stefan Schäffer, Eduard Laborel, "Why the Western Balkans Should Join the EU Immediately," IDM Policy Paper Series 2/2021, https://www.idm.at/idm-policy-paper-series-2-2021/.
[21] *Ibidem.*

level and decided by the European Commission to avoid the vetoing of progress by single member countries due to domestic political reasons or to benefit from this extortion, as it has happened several times before. At this point, our proposed GEC may come in: until such a change in rules is implemented in a treaty revision – if at all – the situation could be alleviated by the GEC, as the possible blocking Member State would have to meet with the blocked candidate country on a regular basis. Furthermore, the close linkage of the GEC to the institutional architecture of the EU might offer a mélange: it offers an institutional framework between an immediate accession, which is only feasible after a potentially lengthy reform process, as well as the gradual accession, where the danger of remaining stuck at a stage due to a lack of willingness from both the applicant and the Member States just as in the current enlargement scheme. The GEC could provide a possibility for gradual convergence up to full integration, while already taking over political responsibility. Through this, deepening and widening could once again be consolidated. As mentioned above, new initiatives could first be taken for a spin in the GEC, while the regular participation in meetings moderates integration up to full membership, thereby easing the dividing line between insiders and outsiders to the EU.

Conclusion and outlook

What could be the next steps? The idea of the Greater European Council should be further explored in the context of the follow-up meetings of the EPC and at the same time within the EU. As mentioned before, to create such a platform, EU treaty reform is not necessary. The GEC could be established by a multilateral agreement; in a later stage, a treaty (including the ratification process) might further formalize the body. The president of the European Council, mandated by the European Council, could take the initiative to invite all interested parties to a first summit, starting with an agenda on global and trans-regional issues, transforming the EPC process from a national to a supranational initiative.

There are certainly valid arguments against formalization. There is indeed a risk that if this would happen too fast, it would kill the format. It is currently merely a community of interest and not of values, the low-key informal structure leaves room for non-binding talks and is equally appreciated by the participants of the EPC summits.[22] It certainly helps to foster dialogue and build trust, thereby, alleviating the trust deficit between a number of countries, within and outside the EU, built over the past years. For the short-term, the "family" picture and the symbolism of the meeting place (Moldova) might be outcome enough, however, we do not think that this spirit will last for long. We rather recommend the gradual transformation from a bi-annual informal platform for heads of state or government, where the host country serves as "secretariat", to a more formalised forum with a standing secretariat, ministerial meetings in different policy areas, a work programme, as well as voluntary but binding final conclusions with strong links to the European Council structures.

[22] Hendrik Kribbe, Simon Lumet, Luuk van Middelaar, "Bringing the Greater European Family Together. New Perspectives on the European Political Community," Brussels Institute for Geopolitics, May 2023, https://big-europe.eu/publication/bringing-the-greater-european-family-together.

The creation of a Greater European Council would facilitate increased cooperation and coordination among European states on a range of issues, thereby improving the effectiveness of European policymaking and implementation. The GEC would provide a platform for the representation of European states on the global stage, thereby also increasing the influence of Europe in international affairs and enhancing representation. Last but not least, due to the nature of its composition, as well as the junction with the structure of European governance, it could serve as a forum enabling the integration process to finally move forward.

But most importantly, it would have the potential to fill the void of the imploded European security architecture with a new layer within a European Security Order, which would end any debate on a "neutral" or "buffer zone" between the EU and the Russian Federation. This European Security Order(s) will be multi-layered, based on a strategic interplay of NATO, the EU, and the GEC, without categorizing first-, second- and third-class members. In all of this, the role of the EU should be crucial. Instead of a reactive, non-binding multi-lateral inter-governmentalism, this new order should foster European integration and strategic autonomy. We believe that it will be important to launch concrete pan-European initiatives addressing the level of citizens and societies to further extend the EU's sphere of freedom, security, and justice.

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Part two.

The REMIT Roundtable

Geopolitics and the impact of the new technologies in the Black Sea region

Anamaria-Florina Caloianu

The inaugural REMIT public event took place on November 9, 2023 at the Faculty of European Studies, Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Organised by the UBB team, led by Professor Valentin Naumescu and PhD Researcher Oana Poiană Marchiș, this roundtable functioned as a hybrid side event during the third edition of the international EUXGLOB conference, which focused on the Perspectives of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.

The REMIT project endeavours to Renew Multilateralism through Technology, emphasizing global challenges like warfare, humanitarian crises, climate change, increasing inequalities, migration issues, health pandemics, and the dissemination of misinformation. It underscores the potential for addressing these challenges through technological advancements, with a specific focus on four key areas: digital, health bio, security & defence, and finance. Concentrating on these technological domains, the project seeks to offer essential analysis and theoretical frameworks to assist the EU in formulating future policies.

Professor Valentin Naumescu, the Director of the EUXGLOB Centre at UBB Cluj, President of the ICDE think-tank, REMIT researcher, and moderator of the debate, facilitated an engaging discussion. The event attracted a notable gathering of experts in military affairs, diplomacy, security, geopolitics, intelligence, and cyber security. Nine experts, representing diverse fields such as government, military, diplomacy, and academia, each delivered succinct presentations on topics related to Geopolitics and the influence of new technologies in the Black Sea region.

The interactive and informative conversation delved into a range of topics, including the EU's geopolitical strategy in the Black Sea region, the strategic impact of the Euro-Atlantic alliance framework, the transformative effects of the war in Ukraine on the cyber threat landscape, the use of drones in the conflict, and the evolving nature of warfare with a focus on systems theory in modern aviation applications.

The BBU REMIT team introduced the REMIT project, provided an update on the team's progress, and outlined the future agenda. Professor Valentin Naumescu moderated the discussion, which gained momentum as speakers explained terminology related to their work. Presentations covered a range of topics, including the future of transatlantic relations, NATO and EU involvement in the Black Sea region, hybrid warfare challenges and opportunities in leadership, drone diplomacy, and cyber security threats with Romania's response.

The President of the Euro-Atlantic Centre for Resilience (E-ARC), Mr. Ovidiu Raețchi, shared insights from E-ARC's Forum on sea resilience, alongside emphasizing the need for digital resilience in countering fake news, disinformation, and cyberattacks. During his presentation, he highlighted the evolution of the Black Sea, transitioning from the "inhospitable" conditions emphasized by ancient Greeks to a contemporary arena witnessing

military build-ups and substantial force deployment. This transformation reflects the inherent shift in the dynamics of military conflicts, driven by advancements in technology that introduce new weaponry and the experimentation of novel strategies within the region. Highlighted by the presenter, the Black Sea region contends with persistent challenges within Russia's Joint Operation Area, including Russian jamming, naval mines, and various maritime incidents, all of which curtail freedom of navigation.

A prevailing theme resonated across various presentations, with a specific focus on Black Sea security: the increasing significance of resilience as a complementary element to traditional defence and deterrence strategies. The effectiveness of resilience initiatives was exemplified by Ukraine's ability to counter aggression through the mobilization of its entire society and governmental infrastructure.

The potential transformation and impact on geopolitics by emerging technologies, such as quantum computing and advanced robotics, are emphasized. In the case of quantum computing, conflict parties can enhance their encryption and decryption capabilities, serving as both a defensive asset and an offensive tool in cyber operations. Concurrently, advanced robotics can facilitate the development of unmanned ground vehicles and advanced drones, mitigating risks to human soldiers in combat zones. As these technologies advance, states must adapt their defence and resilience strategies accordingly.

Artificial intelligence (AI) stands out as the most promising game-changer in battlefield scenarios, particularly with increasing decision-making autonomy. Ongoing projects like Carrera and Loyal Wingman provide insight into the potential of this technology. However, a significant challenge arises: the more communication required between the device and the command centre, the higher the vulnerability to cyber-attacks.

This challenge prompts crucial questions about finding the right balance between autonomy and operator control, as well as achieving an acceptable level of cybersecurity in such an environment. Striking this balance involves minimizing communication with Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) while empowering robots to make independent decisions. Ultimately, decisions revolve around establishing specific criteria for target acquisition or seeking guidance through communication, underscoring concerns related to the affordability and security of cyber-attacks, particularly those exploiting radio-frequency channels.

Therefore, the concept of digital resilience becomes imperative. States must invest in cybersecurity measures (with an ongoing debate on cybersecurity vs. cyber resilience), formulate strategies to counter disinformation campaigns, and build robust infrastructures capable of withstanding cyberattacks. Additionally, fostering international cooperation and information sharing is crucial to staying ahead in the realm of digital challenges.

During his presentation, Dan Cîmpean, the director of the Romanian National Cyber Security Directorate, delved into the transformations in the cyber landscape stemming from the war in Ukraine. In this context, the emergence of new malware strains instigated by Russia, including Prestige, HermeticWiper, and AprilAxe, had a significant impact.

Organisations and private firms were the primary entities affected by these evolving cyber threats, with consequences extending beyond attacks on the official sites and databases

of state institutions. In response, several EU member states, including Romania, implemented decisive measures to counter this threat.

Consequently, all cybersecurity software products or services, including those already acquired or installed, must be promptly discontinued. This includes various components such as device security, endpoint security products, antivirus software, antimalware software applications, web application firewall (WAF), firewall as a service, virtual private networks (VPN) software, and endpoint detection and response systems (EDR).

The Romanian Parliament passed Law 354/2022, which prohibits any public authority or body from acquiring or using cybersecurity software products and services originating from the Russian Federation. This law is effective throughout the entire duration of the Russian invasion against Ukraine, continuing until the signing of a peace treaty or a permanent armistice agreement that establishes the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Romania becomes the fourth EU country to implement such legislation in the realm of cybersecurity.

Speakers underscored the significance of academic responses, advocating for improved communication between academia and civil society to combat misinformation. The Dean of the Faculty of Intelligence Studies at the "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy reaffirmed its dedication to equipping graduates with the skills needed to effectively address security threats.

The vice-dean of the Military Science Faculty of the "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy in Sibiu, Romania, Lt. Col. Paul Tudorache, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the topic of stimulating military decisional resilience through artificial intelligence. Focusing on the Black Sea region and gleaning insights from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the speaker emphasized that military forces, both collectively and their leaders individually, grapple with operational challenges in environments marked by pronounced volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA).

Effectively addressing these challenges necessitates strategic initiatives that begin with nurturing independent thinkers and culminate in advocating for clear and concise direction. In the contemporary landscape, a significant challenge affecting all societal domains is the capacity to design, develop, and utilize Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDTs).

The speaker delved into another aspect of the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the context of their field of expertise. Specifically, the focus was on the use of AI in supporting commanders and their staff during training and military operations. This involvement spans understanding the situation, implementing the commander's decisions, exercising control over the operation, and assessing the progress of the operation. In this context, the integration of AI not only enhances the commander's decisional resilience, contributing to the reinforcement of their mental agility, but also brings about secondary effects related to decisional speed and accuracy - crucial prerequisites for operational flexibility.

Lieutenant Colonel Curtis D. Cordon explored the utilization of drones in warfare, noting that while drones are influencing the character of war, they are not altering its fundamental nature. He highlighted the Ukraine war as a testing ground for researching the application of drones in warfare, emphasizing that this conflict has witnessed a significantly higher use of drones than any previous war. Classifying them into three categories commonly

found in the US arsenal—Class I (<150 kg), Class II (150-600 kg), and Class III (>600 kg)—he underscored their changing roles from military surveillance to combat capabilities, exemplified by their deployment in the war in Ukraine.

Utilizing drones presents two main advantages: asymmetric cost benefits in terms of lives and financial resources, and the provision of situational awareness.

In terms of asymmetric costs, it is evident that deploying swarms of drones to target critical objectives, each with a cost in the thousands, requires interception and can efficiently exhaust a stockpile of million-dollar air defence missiles at a relatively low cost. The cost curve significantly favours the attacker when drones are the chosen weapon, making it difficult to intercept all of them when employed in this manner. Achieving comprehensive interception is nearly impossible.

The distinctive aspect of situational awareness is particularly relevant to the nature of the conflict in Ukraine, where both parties utilize drones for surveillance and attacks, diminishing the element of surprise. As anticipated by many, this adds another layer to the evolving dynamics of the war in Ukraine.

The ability of drones to bypass air defences is attributed to their low and slow flight characteristics, necessitating updates or new systems for radars calibrated to faster-moving targets. Addressing these low and slow threats requires fighters equipped with look-down-shoot-down radars and specialized training. Drones, especially those resembling cruise missiles, introduce complexities to targeting solutions.

Discussions delved into distinctions among drone types, including the Switchblade 300, and highlighted global participation from nations such as Turkey, Iran, and China. Several of the previously mentioned countries have adjusted their diplomatic priorities due to advancements in their defence industry, providing them with negotiating leverage and more opportunities for profitable bilateral agreements.

Russia effectively disrupted Ukrainian energy infrastructure last winter by 30%, primarily through drone attacks. This winter, a similar approach may be employed to plunge Ukraine into a dark, cold period, intensifying despair and diminishing public support for the ongoing war. Iran employs a significantly higher number of drones in their defence framework than armies with twice the funding, showcasing drones as an offset.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine demonstrates that drones have the potential to tip the scale, disrupt the balance of combat forces, and serve as replacements for aircraft and long-range artillery. The efficiency of drones is continually being proven.

One of, if not the most crucial aspect of warfare is information, and drones play a vital role in providing it. The initial idea behind deploying flying vehicles during WWI was to gather information about trenches and assist in artillery spotting. Today, drones have evolved into the ultimate source of information, offering what is known as situational awareness to both airmen and soldiers.

Class I drones on the battlefield, particularly the so-called "Hobbyist drones," are significantly impacting information gathering. These drones can be adapted with modifications such as zip-tied batteries, 40mm shells with 3D-printed tail kits, jamming antennas, night vision goggles, and more. These drones are enhancing the precision of artillery fire and intensifying

the pace of battles and most crucially, they provide soldiers with information about the enemy's location and activities. Both opposing sides are actively engaging in this dynamic, making it challenging to determine a clear winner. The Ministry of Digital Transformation in Ukraine has committed 1 billion euros to drone development, aiming for a distribution of half Chinese (DJI) supplied drones and half indigenous supplied drones.

Securing victory in the war now entails mastering the technological marathon while sustaining a robust on-the-ground response, with a focus on quantity, whether it be in the form of extensive artillery fire or swarms of drones. The necessity of replacing cost-effective Class I drones, often limited to only several flights on average, is as crucial as replenishing ammunition like 155mm rounds. The repurposing of agricultural drones to assist in handling this supply and demand underscores the industrial-scale nature of the conflict, underscoring that the production of drones is pivotal for achieving success.

The utilization of Class III drones in the Ukraine war has occurred, although not to the same extent as Class I and Class II. The United States remains attentive to the impact of drone warfare and continues the development of its own Class III drones, exemplified by aircraft like the Global Hawk, Reaper, and Predator.

An innovative concept being tested within this category is the Dedicated Wingman, likely serving as a force multiplier. In this setup, a manned aircraft directs, and controls unmanned aircraft functioning as its wingman. In scenarios where aircraft become limited by missile quantity, the dedicated wingman, being pilotless and equipped with more missiles, becomes a valuable force multiplier.

Concerns were raised about the future of autonomous drone operations, particularly regarding the potential for cyberattacks, adding an additional layer of complexity to the ongoing technological developments in this field.

In summary, the event underscored the evolving role of technology in contemporary conflicts, notably evident in the ongoing war in Ukraine. Many speakers emphasized that modern warfare is intricately tied to navigating a technological marathon while simultaneously bolstering ground-level actions.

The prospective landscape of warfare could undergo substantial changes with the widespread integration of AI across different domains. Additionally, the shifting dynamics of conflicts highlight a trend where surveillance takes precedence over military actions, marking a significant transformation in warfare. A recurring theme emphasized in all presentations was the idea of resilience, given the swift and intense challenges faced by various industries and fields. This necessitated improved mobilization and strategic utilization of limited resources.

List of roundtable participants:

- Dr. Ovidiu Raețchi, Secretary of State, President of the Euro-Atlantic Centre for Resilience (E-ARC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest.
- Dr. Olga Chiriac, Project Europe, Head of Engagement at the Irregular Warfare Initiative, USA, associated researcher at the Centre for Strategic Studies in Bucharest.

- Dan Cîmpean, Director of Romanian National Cyber Security Directorate, Representative of Romania in European Cybersecurity Competence Centre Governing Board, Bucharest.
- Assoc. prof. Răzvan Grigoraș, Dean of the Faculty of Intelligence Studies, “Mihai Viteazul” National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest.
- Lt. Col. Professor Paul Tudorache**,** Vice-Dean of the Military Science Faculty at the “Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy, Sibiu.
- Associate Professor Silviu Nate, Lucian Blaga University Sibiu, Director of the Global Studies Centre, Sibiu.
- Professor Mircea Boscoianu, Transilvania University Brașov, Senior researcher at the National Institute for Aerospace Research “Elie Carafoli” Bucharest.
- Dr. Oana Poiană Marchiș, Researcher at the Institute of International Relations and Area Studies, UBB Cluj, REMIT researcher.
- Lt. Col. Curtis D. Cordon, Air, Space & Nuclear Policy Advisor, US Military Delegation to the NATO Military Committee, Brussels.

Part three.

EUXGOB III Conference Papers

The EU'S Eastern Neighbourhood Policy: A Geopolitical Conundrum[1]

Silviu Nate

Abstract. This chapter examines the complex geopolitical conundrum facing the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood policy, contending with Russian imperial ambitions and civilizational warfare. It argues that the EU must rethink its strategy, adapting to new security threats through closer NATO ties, a smart power approach, and a long-term vision promoting regional connectivity. Overcoming paralysis requires unity of purpose, constraints on resurgent Russian hegemony, and consolidation of a strategic culture anchored in Atlanticist first principles.

Keywords: Eastern Partnership; Ukraine; the Black Sea region; Russia; South Caucasus

Introduction

The Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union is often associated with interferences or blockages that stand in the way of democratic aspirations but also with the failure to modernise states and societies. The Soviet legacy and the Russian Federation's patronage of the states in the Eastern Neighbourhood are directly related to the Kremlin's self-proclamation of the so-called "spheres of influence". In the absence of its own economic and institutional modernisation, but also of the failure of emancipation in the sense of human autonomy from political power, Russia projected a dominant model, condemning the region to a lower existence of development compared to its level for preserving privileges.

The history of the Greater Black Sea Region, the Caucasus and Central Asia has been marked by political loyalties subservient to Kremlin interests, often operated through informal money and political influence networks. In the absence of modernisation and emancipation, the human spirit and aspirations have been mutilated by denying access to the opportunities an open and free world offers.

Unfortunately, this struggle marked by value contradictions and stakes continues to be waged both from within the societies of the Eastern European neighbourhood and outside them to their domestic environment. Taking as a basis the theories of modernisation and reconstruction, specific research on large batches of states[2] highlights that economic integration and modernisation have a transformative effect, ultimately leading to social emancipation and democratisation. The cultural and traditional characteristics of a society condition the speed of change. It is worth noting that value transformation is generational, influenced by the experience of younger generations regarding economic freedom and institutional health. Therefore, we can admit that regardless of the legitimate aspirations of the states in the Eastern Neighbourhood, and not considering the current external negative pressures, the reconstruction

[1] This work was supported by Hasso Plattner Foundation through the grant LBUS-UARO-2023, financed by the Knowledge Transfer Centre of the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

[2] Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

and modernisation processes have a relatively slow pace, influenced by the accumulated historical legacies. Starting from these assumptions, we acknowledge that only long-term strategies are viable, and economic growth and internal reforms drive sustainable democratic institutionalism.

Russian Civilisational War And European Eastern Neighbourhood Drama

The Russian Federation often used its ideology along with Russian Orthodoxy and the idea under the pretext of protecting the rights and identity of Russian populations in other countries to justify its imperial actions. This ideology can be considered an attempt to integrate religious and cultural concepts into its foreign policy.

Alexander Dugin approached Huntington's "cultural fault lines"[3] theme in several ways. He is known for supporting an ideology called "Eurasianism", which sees Russia as a bridge between Europe and Asia, with a special mission in the world, and here we witness a type of exceptionalism that rejects multiculturalism. Dugin argues that Russia should be the centre of a "Eurasian civilisation" that opposes Western influence. This concept is based on Huntington's idea of a "clash of civilisations" but with a specific Russian perspective. Dugin sees the cultural rifts between Russia and the West as significant and argues for countering Western influence by promoting an anti-Western current.[4]

This civilisational warfare construct has promoted the idea that Russia should expand its influence in the Eurasian space, including the countries of the former Soviet Union, to create a strong bloc to compete with the West. This expansion can be seen as a reaction to the clash of civilisations and an attempt to shape regional policy according to its Eurasian values and interests. In conclusion, perhaps the most prominent Russian geopolitician, Alexander Dugin, exploited the theme of "cultural fault lines" in Samuel Huntington's theory to promote a Eurasian vision of politics and geopolitics in which Russia plays a central role. However, it is important to note that Dugin's vision is controversial and criticised by many analysts and politicians, both inside and outside Russia.

Russia has long claimed itself as a European civilisation and extracted benefits, but it has also had painful experiences. It is now moving closer to the Asian world, constrained by its difficulties in fighting the West. Another civilisational explanation is related to the values on which the leadership of a state is built in the sense of its traditions and history. Here, we find a political incompatibility because the Russian civilisational model does not seem capable of supporting democracy.

Avoiding The Strategic Trap

While Russia has approached the Black Sea and South Caucasus coastal states through the prism of a geopolitical project, the European Union has taken a different approach. Although we do not question the nature of the existence of the European Union as a genuine soft power, its good intentions, stabilisation, reform, and democratisation plans for the Eastern

[3] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," in Steven Seidman, Jeffrey C. Alexander (eds.), *The New Social Theory Reader*, London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 305-313.
[4] Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, London: Arktos, 2012.

neighbourhood have been disproportionate and perhaps even inadequate to the regional hegemonic tendencies of the Russian Federation. Consequently, Russia's hegemonic game could not and still cannot be counterbalanced by the European Union alone.

The harsh lesson received by Europeans after a long strategic hibernation led to the understanding that perpetuating negative dependencies on the Russian Federation and deepening economic relations with Moscow to the detriment of assuming a project with real geopolitical value for the Eastern neighbourhood were tactical traps exploited by the Kremlin.

European tendencies to engage neighbouring states in an integration project have oscillated dominantly between the competition of Chancellor Angela Merkel's leading position and French perspectives.

The marathon for European strategic autonomy and the competition for primacy in the affairs of post-Brexit Europe have weakened the inclusiveness of policies and visions for the Eastern neighbourhood. Also, the issue of security in the Black Sea was a topic largely ignored until the illegal annexation of Crimea, followed by weak reactions from Brussels and a cold shower on February 24, 2022. The European Union's relationship with its eastern neighbourhood has been slow and timidly assumed.

Unfortunately, the costs of non-involvement were determined by different perceptions of European states on insecurity and risks. Geography and physical distance from the E.U.'s eastern border were critical factors to Western countries; Clubs of states that promoted or still promote Europe at several speeds; economic interdependencies with Russia; certain internal political individuals with affinities for Moscow and differentiated objectives prioritisation of national interest did not find convergence in a common foreign and neighbourhood policy agenda.

This pattern has not disappeared definitively, but we have witnessed some awakening of the Union's states, fuelled by the need for a European status quo, reactivated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the memory of the Cold War. However, European coercive diplomacy and the sanctions regime applied to Russia have not had the expected success in inhibiting Moscow's further offensive actions.

Without the primary military assistance of the United States, U.K., and NATO to limit the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation, the European Union would have been doomed to turn its strategic fetishes into strategic deceptions.

The (Un)Conventional Warfare

Russia is not only waging a conventional war with Europe but is using physical aggression to sustain influence operations throughout the European continent.

The blockade of grain exports from Ukraine has exacerbated a food security crisis in the Middle East and Africa, increasing the risk of famine. The overall picture suggests that the Russian Federation is putting significant pressure on certain African states by withdrawing from the grain agreement but also by bombing Ukrainian loading and export facilities on the Danube. These actions have become levers for generating overlapping crises if we associate, for example, military crises or coups d'état in Sudan and Niger. Armed conflicts in Africa and famine eventually cause forced migration, a phenomenon that puts pressure on Europe.

This reality generates public discontent in Europe, with governors often overwhelmed by the situation and many nationalist and far-right parties, some supported by Moscow, gaining adherents amid anti-immigration discourse. Unfortunately, these political parties have the potential to grow on the wave of anti-migration discourse, and Russia has a great ability to provoke anti-system propaganda vectors in Europe. Ultimately, the political fragmentation of the West is in Putin's favour, and more problems for Europe will mean less support for Ukraine.

In summary, we can say that food insecurity and support for coups in Africa are becoming political weapons at Moscow's fingertips in its "unseen" or unconventional war with Europe. By keeping the flow of grain exports open, Romania alleviates the pressure put by Russia on African states and implicitly on Western Europe but also supports Ukraine's economy. Romania's effort, which provides 70% of Ukrainian grain export flows, contributes to the European political balance, while Russia pursues political changes through conventional and unconventional means.

Europe's eastern neighbourhood is not exempted from challenges, but regional anarchy will increase without the committed and coordinated involvement of extra-regional actors in an extended format. Russia has always promoted buffer zones by claiming them as part of its sphere of influence. Grey areas and frozen conflicts are precursors for confiscating states' sovereignty, and insecurity in the Wider Black Sea Region generates a contagious effect on European insecurity, the grain crisis being just one example of many other harmful phenomena.

Acknowledging a changing geopolitical and security environment in the region, especially in the Black Sea, the European Union must adapt, living for a while with war. Due to Russia's ability to channel its economic resources into war, this situation may also have adverse consequences, which require reinvention and expansion of the European Union's functions, and profile change is necessary so it can adjust its roles for projecting stability in the neighbourhood.

The South Caucasus And Black Sea Area Geopolitical Constraints

The way the Eastern Partnership functioned through assistance in implementing reforms and economic diplomacy was insufficient, and after Russia's invasion triggered on February 24, 2022, Brussels became more aware that the security issue must be integrated. It is essential to rethink the Eastern Partnership to become a support vector for winning the war while developing infrastructure and connectivity projects from Europe to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. If it existed, the previous European geopolitical perspective is no longer feasible; the overall picture has changed while considering the indispensable but ambivalent roles of Azerbaijan and Turkey, which have created certain dependencies on Russia.

By de-escalating the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, Erdoğan sees the Lachin corridor as an opportunity for connectivity and long-term economic benefits, acting cautiously. Turkey's position is for Russia to withdraw its troops, Ankara winning a veto, but Russia will not leave the region in the way it is discussed and will seek to control Armenia. The war in Ukraine has prompted a rethinking of Russia's targeted trade routes in the South Caucasus. New prospects indicate Moscow's increased interest in a north-south route to Iran via Azerbaijan and more transit routes to Turkey.

Turkey's interest in an open Azeri-Armenian border is based on economic and security reasons. Therefore, Turkey has no reason to encourage a new war in the South Caucasus.

Amid the background of the war in Ukraine, geopolitical changes show that Russia no longer wants and can no longer support the strategic balance in the South Caucasus region, while Israel's role has greatly increased in the area by capitalising on the strategic partnership with Azerbaijan.

Reducing Russian military influence is an action that will aim for larger goals. On the one hand, achieving transit routes was discussed with Iran. On the other hand, because Russia has never been an altruistic power, the area's status remains unclear in the absence of a peace agreement and clear territorial delimitations. But there are also certain shortcomings because Turkey supports this corridor, and Erdoğan has clarified that Iran opposes the increase in Azerbaijan's power with an adversarial approach. Limited Western involvement has indirectly favoured the current situation, leading to Baku's denial of Armenia's statehood, setting an impermissible precedent.

Armenia appears to be the country farthest from the West, dependent on energy supplied by Russia. It has established military cooperation with Russia by hosting a Russian military facility on its territory and other acute economic exchanges. Given these variables, Russia could transform Armenia into a new buffer zone or frozen conflict if it moves away from Moscow's goals. To limit Russia's additional leverage, Azerbaijan should be reined in, and Armenia close to the West through concrete mechanisms, but Yerevan is overwhelmed by the influence of the FSB and Iran. The economic and political alternatives in the region are led by the U.S. and Germany, which does not shy away from assuming European leadership, showing pragmatic and efficient approaches. Amid these complicated relations in the South Caucasus, the E.U. can be a powerful vector to limit authoritarian tendencies using coercive diplomacy.

Azerbaijan is proving to be an energy partner for Europe and, at the same time, a problematic actor, as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh puts additional pressure on the European Union. Russia, Turkey, and Iran want to keep the Lachin corridor open for trade reasons, while Azerbaijan has ambitions as an occupier in the region. As previously stated, Russia's so-called decoupling from Europe is linked to regional and economic competitive arguments for Turkey's ambitions. Russia is interested in developing its economic relevance in the Caucasus and the Middle East by implementing routes with the participation of Iran. Under the pretext of importing Russian gas for national demand, Azerbaijan is susceptible to rerouting[5] Russian gas to Europe by signing 1 billion cubic meters of gas agreement with Gazprom in November 2022, but also by using possible subsidiary agreements with Russia, importing 1.5-2 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Turkmenistan, via Iran. Such situations create additional obstacles in the EU-Azerbaijan relationship, with Brussels ignoring the

[5] Adrien Pécout, Faustine Vincent, "Rising Gas Imports from Azerbaijan Embarrass Europe," *Le Monde.fr*, October 9, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2023/10/08/rising-gas-imports-from-azerbaijan-embarrass-europe_6157430_19.html.

undermining effect of the E.U.'s objective[6] of limiting Russia's ability to sell gas on the global market. Russia's coordination with Azerbaijan is justified both by energy interests and by Moscow's need to move its "peacekeeping forces" from Nagorno-Karabakh to the Ukrainian theatre of war, abandoning Armenia to Azerbaijan without credible security guarantees. It will be challenging for the European Union to get Armenia out of the traps placed by Russia.

Although Georgia has proposed candidate status to join the European Union, it is facing a democratic and institutional decline, incompatible with the majority desire of Georgian society to join the Euro-Atlantic world. Georgia's exit from the trio with Ukraine and Moldova has created an inopportune gap in E.U. accession aspirations.

In Europe, the second word used after *war* is *resilience*. In the case of Ukraine, without a functioning economy and ensuring the usual flows of existence, the army cannot be sustained.

Regionally and locally, the Russo-Ukrainian War is primarily about the Kremlin's political stakes and control of political regimes.

In a broader geographical version, the war is aimed at the total conquest of Ukraine, controlling Belarus, and isolating the Baltic states from the Western bloc under the pretext of defending ethnic Russians, providing a land bridge to the Kaliningrad exclave and a reinforced military corridor from the mouth of the Danube to the Baltic Sea. Therefore, the broader stakes of the Russian invasion aim to cancel military, commercial and energy projections in the Black Sea, but especially to problematise European security and obtain leverage to condition economic and state affairs to Europe and the U.S. – a return of Russia to the circuit of great powers.

And precisely because Putin is not giving up on his goals, coalition members supporting Ukraine must also adopt a long-term strategy. Kyiv needs long-range weapons, electronic warfare, drone reconnaissance and surveillance, and air supremacy capabilities to strike deep on the enemy front. Unfortunately, if Western support for Ukraine does not improve significantly, the Russian military will exploit this moment of vulnerability.

When talking about Russia's larger stakes and challenging the European security architecture, one of Putin's goals is to discredit the U.S. ability to contribute to Europe's defence, with a desire to fracture the transatlantic relationship within NATO. Moreover, losing the war to Ukraine would jeopardise the rules-based international order.[7] A Russian victory would encourage other states ruled by authoritarian regimes to use military force to resolve political disputes while helping to increase the arc of global instability.

Georgia Meloni's statement is also eloquent: "If Russia had not invaded Ukraine, Hamas would most likely not have launched such an attack against Israel."[8]

Europeans aim for a survival policy, not reconstruction for Ukraine, with somewhat more integrated approaches to the country's Western region. European engagement is based

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[6] William Howey, "Azerbaijan's Gas Exports to the EU Face Challenges," Economist Intelligence Unit, July 10, 2023, https://www.eiu.com/n/azerbaijans-gas-exports-to-the-eu-face-challenges.

[7] German Council on Foreign Relations, "Two Years After Russia's Full-Scale Invasion: Ukrainian Resilience and European Support," February 22, 2024, https://dgap.org/en/media/15907.

[8] Jones Hayden, "Italy's Meloni: If Russia Hadn't Invaded Ukraine, Hamas Wouldn't Have Attacked Israel," POLITICO, February 25, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/italys-meloni-if-russia-hadnt-invaded-ukraine-hamas-wouldnt-have-attacked-israel.

on caution, requiring coordination and a long-term perspective. Rather it is about maintaining Ukraine's vital functions: a functional economy, necessary punctual repairs (shelters, energy infrastructure), and societal resilience to resist military aggression. Therefore, practical discussions at the European level are limited for now to recovery and repair.

Germany has financial capacity and a stronger commitment to capitalise on the role of private capital in the reconstruction process, framing it as a key role, and sees opportunities for business by identifying partners in Ukraine.

The German perspective suggests agenda formulas for providing support for reforms, engaging municipalities, the human dimension and strengthening human capital in Ukraine - including diaspora and refugees, building democracy and resilience, administrative modernisation through de-bureaucratisation and digitalisation.

A long-term conflict implies that investments in reconstruction are conditioned by a stable security environment.

The three main lines of work discussed at the level of European envoys[9] for Ukraine aim at:

1. keeping the economy and society functioning.
2. Infrastructural repairs, maintenance, and resilience.
3. Ukraine's accommodation with the European Union.

In parallel, both bilaterally with Ukraine and at the level of the European Union, efforts are being made to optimise defence industries and ensure Ukraine's war capabilities. Fearing an escalation of a Russia-NATO conflict, the subject of security guarantees for Ukraine has moved to a peripheral spectrum.

Both the war and the projects rely on the contribution of civil society, which will also be the main beneficiary of Ukraine's recovery. Although the war has not been won, Ukraine needs to adapt to European conditionalities on decentralisation and thus respect cooperation with civil society to have continuity with the E.U. Civil society is an integral part of global governance, which requires more decision-making transparency, but martial law limits this. Participatory budgets are suitable, but society is unprepared and prefers to support the armed forces. Beyond the need for survival, attention is focused on economic rebuilding and maintaining the Ukrainian maritime corridor for grain and steel exporting. While few solutions are available, Ukraine's recovery requires a plan based on a coherent concept, capabilities, capital, and coordination. Civil society is important in reporting problems and drafting laws; institutional resilience increases through collaborative governance and decentralisation, attracting more beneficiaries.

We, therefore, understand that the instrumentation of the E.U.'s agenda for the Eastern Neighbourhood remains complex and complicated. Moreover, Russia's regional hegemonic decline is associated with more instability and competing regional blocks, forcing the E.U. to fill the vacuum left and avoid escalating conflicts with potentially broader implications.

[9] New Strategy Centre, "Panel I. Messages from Romanian and Ukrainian Prime Ministers (RO)," YouTube, December 13, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T91NGa1utI4.

Welcoming Central Asia's Geoeconomic Competition

Amid Russia's hegemonic decline and weakening geopolitical influence, Central Asia has recently become an area of competing external influences, which include China, America, the European Union, and India.

China had hoped to monopolise the Middle Corridor as part of its expanding Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). But countries have grown increasingly wary of participating in it. They've seen China leave many of its BRI promises unfulfilled. And they also worry that involvement comes with too many geopolitical strings attached and can lead to debt traps.[10]

Strategic economic competition aims to design large east-west trade corridors, and this theme will acquire greater centrality than in the past. The "New War of Corridors" integrates major Western infrastructure projects for energy, transport, trade, and digitalisation from Kazakhstan to the Black Sea (Middle Corridor) and from India through the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel to the Mediterranean Sea and further to Greece, Italy, France, and Germany – a route already assumed within the G20 (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor).

The new geoeconomic reconfigurations will suggest the structure and reliability of future strategic alliances, a vital theme to internalise for Romanian decision-makers. Although looking from a distance, there could be a feeling of decoupling of some Western states from Ukraine, assuming a Eurasian geoeconomic macro-project would aim at reconstructing Ukraine by placing it on the route of strategic connectivity between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. From this point, there would be additional arguments for Ukraine's security, but until such a moment, the Russian provocation remains the main working topic.

East-West interconnection projects advance the economic rationale to compete with Russia and China, seeking Western development and security parity between the Pacific and the Mediterranean. This geopolitical modelling will temper Russia's ambitions to instrumentalise its southern strategy of using Central Asia as a gateway to Islamic and Asian states to use destabilising proxies for Red Sea maritime trade routes, as well as project its strategic energy interests.

The precondition of East-West interconnection is the guarantee of free navigation in the Black Sea, which can ultimately be the result of a type of thinking based on Europe's direct interdependence with Central Asia and the West's interest in integrating the Black Sea region into a winning strategic equation; however, to materialise these ambitions, a Cold War thinking is much more necessary now than being thrown by Russia into this scenario with new borders, stretching as far as Poland and Romania, at the risk of generating additional fronts for the U.S. and weakening its presence in the Pacific.[11]

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[10] Silviu Nate, James Jay Carafano, "The West Should Welcome the Middle Corridor," *The National Interest*, October 1, 2022, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/west-should-welcome-middle-corridor-205085.

[11] Silviu Nate, "Navigând printre umbrele 'autismului strategic' sau câteva considerații privind locul anului 2024 pe harta provocărilor globale" (Navigating among the shadows of "strategic autism" or a few considerations on the place of 2024 on the global challenges map), *Contributors*, December 30, 2023, https://www.contributors.ro/navigand-printre-umbrele-autismului-strategic-sau-cateva-consideratii-privind-locul-anului-2024-pe-harta-provocarilor-globale/.

Upcoming Challenges

According to NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, defeating Russia means deterring Russia from attacking NATO. Ukraine must be a sovereign nation, and the price of control for Putin must become too high. It also means that Ukraine liberates territory and is able to create a corridor in the Black Sea to repel the Russian Fleet. Inflicting heavy on the Russian army and "if there are high costs for Putin, he will sit down at the negotiating table, the message being that Russia cannot control Ukraine".[12]

Although Germany's economic strength is far-reaching and the current German leadership is characterised by strategic vision, the geoeconomic perspective will not secure the region and long-term investments. This standpoint suggests the need for complementarity and commitment from hard power actors who can properly assist Ukraine. One can hope that Zeitenwende is a long-lasting commitment.

The new Silk Road to Europe will also come through the South Caucasus, Georgia, and Turkey. For the first time, on October 25, 2023, congressional hearings[13] raised whether China would participate in the reconstruction of Ukraine. These issues are important because China's long-term economic profile in the region might gain strategic valence.

Another challenge relates to Ukraine's future and the red lines that will be negotiated with Russia. Future questions arise! What levers of regional coercion will Russia keep in the region? What will support for Ukraine consist of for reconstruction, security, and defence guarantees?

Possible political changes in Europe and the United States following the 2024 elections may accentuate weaknesses that non-democratic powers will exploit in various ways. Therefore, Europe and the U.S. must be healthy at home to be effective abroad.

Suggesting The EU's Strategic Imperatives

The E.U. has the profile of a credible political actor and mediator but needs to be a complete guarantor because it lacks coercive instruments of hard power. Combining soft and hard capabilities brings us to Joseph Nye's smart power concept. Therefore, by enhancing complementarity with NATO, the E.U. can advance a geopolitical vision by engaging in a smart-power strategy with defensive military elements and active economic and diplomatic actions in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The E.U. alone cannot assume a geopolitical project for the Eastern neighbourhood but can co-opt extra-regional democratic partners who can implement a comprehensive security project.

On the other hand, China's deployment in the region will pose an additional challenge for the E.U., as well as for the U.S. and the U.K. Focusing on countering hegemonic ambitions might be a good European mindset for structuring future policies in the eastern vicinity.

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[12] The Heritage Foundation, "NATO Secretary General on Modern Needs of the Alliance 75 Years After Its Founding," YouTube, January 31, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bM4hwUyHeaI.

[13] United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "Assessing the Department of State's Strategy for Security in the Black Sea Region," October 25, 2023, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/assessing-the-department-of-states-strategy-for-security-in-the-black-sea-region.

The geopolitical conundrum facing the E.U.'s Eastern Neighbourhood policy is multifaceted. Russia's civilisational warfare and imperial ambitions have destabilised the region and threatened European security. However, the E.U.'s past approach has been insufficient, overly cautious, and lacked strategic vision.

Fundamentally, the E.U. must adapt to new security realities, including an aggressive and hostile Russia. This requires rethinking the Eastern Partnership to support Ukraine militarily while focusing on infrastructure connectivity and economic projects linking Europe to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Extra-regional democratic partners like the U.S. and NATO are key to implementing a comprehensive regional security framework.

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The European Perspective for Georgia – Why a Different Path from Ukraine and Moldova?

Khatuna Chapichadze

Abstract. The paper aims at finding out the functional reasons behind the EU decision of June 23, 2022, made for Georgia in terms of its prospects for accession to the European community, i.e. the European perspective, which differed from the candidate country status awarded to Ukraine and Moldova. First of all, noteworthy to mention that the Georgian government planned to apply for EU candidate status later on, in 2024, although, the new geopolitical realities emerged particularly for the whole post-Soviet space and the Black Sea Basin countries as a consequence of the ongoing yet Russian-Ukrainian War, created a special momentum for accelerated application initiatives from the part of the Associated Trio and the EU to timely endorse the membership perspectives. Along with objectively acknowledging to the greater extent, the problems on its way towards the enhancement of Georgia's integration with the EU, addressed by the EU Commission through 12 and 9 priorities to be fulfilled for gaining the candidacy status that covered such issues as political polarization, democratic oversight, the electoral framework, the judiciary, the media, the appointment of the Public Defender (Ombudsperson), strengthening the independence of the Anti-Corruption Agency, "de-oligarchisation," the fight against organised crime, human rights, gender equality, the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes, fighting disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference against the EU and its values, and improving Georgia's alignment with the EU common foreign and security policy, there are other significant factors too, starting with at least confusing foreign policy course of the current political leadership of Georgia - a critical variable, as well as much complex geopolitical contexts, emphasizing primarily the areal limitations for the South Caucasian state, which still need considerable attention, even despite firstly the European Commission's truly historic recommendation of November 8, 2023, and then the European Council's also landmark decision of December 14, 2023, to finally grant the EU candidate status to Georgia.

Keywords.
The European Perspective for Georgia; Georgia; EU; the Twelve Priorities; the EU candidate status; Ukraine; Moldova

Introduction

In the first place, there needs to be underlined that Georgia and its leadership aimed to issue the application for gaining the EU candidate status in 2024, however, the new geopolitical conditions arising from the current Russian-Ukrainian War for the former Soviet area and the Black Sea Basin countries, have given special impetus to the advanced application processes from the part of the Associated Trio, including Georgia, and the EU's readiness as well to promptly and generally positively respond to the call of time if we may use such an expression, in relation to usually quite scarce in fact enlargement prospects for the European Community, especially when it comes to the post-Soviet states and their integration opportunities with the EU.

Along with objectively and widely recognizing of the obstacles on its way towards the advancement of Georgia's integration with the EU, addressed by the EU Commission first of all through popular 12, and later 9 priorities to be fulfilled in the first place for gaining and successfully enjoying the candidacy status by the country, the priorities that cover such issues as political polarization, democratic oversight, the electoral framework, the judiciary, the media, the appointment of the Public Defender (Ombudsperson), strengthening the independence of the Anti-Corruption Agency, "de-oligarchisation," the fight against organised crime, human rights, gender equality, the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes, fighting disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference against the EU and its values, and improving Georgia's alignment with the EU common foreign and security policy, there are at least two other weighty factors of crucial consideration as well. In the given context, we identify the following factors: 1. At least quite unclear foreign policy orientation and dubious steps taken by the current Georgian leadership, particularly in connection with Russia, that we account as a critical variable exposed to future changes; and 2. Even though much attractive, but hard geopolitics of Georgia – focusing on its in fact areal limitations that need constant attention in spite of any positive developments, among which definitely should be mentioned first of all, the European Commission's historic recommendation of November 8, 2023, and shortly after, the European Council's also greatly impactful decision of December 14, 2023, to finally grant the EU candidate status to Georgia.

The Twelve Priorities

a) Brief Overview

Undoubtedly, there has been a persisting need to objectively identify, assess, recognize, and probably also broadly accept the challenges to overcome on its path towards the advancement of Georgia's integration with the EU that have been addressed by the EU Commission through the famous twelve priorities, which were suggested to be fulfilled in a duly and timely manner for gaining the candidacy status.

The Twelve Priorities covered such issues as democracy, rule of law, judicial reform, and fundamental rights, in particular:

1. The issue of political polarization, ensuring cooperation across political parties in the spirit of the April 19 agreement (the document of crucial importance for overcoming precisely political polarization - the EU-mediated agreement of 2021, which resolved a six-month political crisis in Georgia following the 2020 parliamentary elections and proposed large-scale electoral and judiciary reforms; The ruling Georgian Dream party demonstratively withdrew from the agreement shortly in several months after signing it, while the largest opposition United National Movement party, as well as the Alliance of Patriots, European Georgia and Labour party, the four opposition groups that received parliamentary mandates in the October 2020 parliamentary elections, refused to join the deal at all.).
2. Guaranteeing the full functioning of all state institutions, strengthening their independent and effective accountability as well as their democratic oversight functions, and further improve the electoral framework.

3. Implementing a transparent and effective judicial reform strategy and action plan based on a broad, inclusive, and cross-party consultation process, ensuring a judiciary that is fully independent, accountable, and impartial, and safeguarding the separation of powers.
4. Strengthening the independence of the Anti-Corruption Agency, in particular addressing high-level corruption cases; equipping the new Special Investigative Service and Personal Data Protection Service with resources commensurate to their mandates and ensuring their independence.
5. Implementing the commitment to "de-oligarchisation" by eliminating the excessive influence of vested interests in economic, political, and public life. (Along with the issue of political polarization, "de-oligarchisation" in fact stands as another most pressing challenge that contemporary Georgian democracy faces to significantly critical degree, addressing of which is a concern of absolutely dire emergency.)
6. Strengthening the fight against organised crime, notably by ensuring rigorous investigations, prosecutions and a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions; guaranteeing accountability and oversight of law enforcement agencies.
7. Undertaking stronger efforts to guarantee a free, professional, pluralistic, and independent media environment, notably by ensuring that criminal procedures brought against media owners fulfil the highest legal standards, and by launching impartial, effective, and timely investigations in cases of threats against the safety of journalists. (Among the most widely known cases, the arrest and prison sentence of Nika Gvaramia, noted Georgian opposition journalist, media manager, and director of government-critical Mtavari Arkhi TV, in May of 2022, who later, in June of 2023, got pardoned by the Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, has to be mentioned here as reportedly, - "politically motivated"[1] case. Another broadly acclaimed case regarding massively attacking journalists has been the set of events that took place on July 5-6, 2022[2] when around 53 journalists were physically and/or verbally attacked in Tbilisi during anti-LGBT rallies. As a consequence of the July of 2021 events, cameraman Aleksandre (Lekso) Lashkarava died days after he was brutally assaulted by the far-right mob, while covering the July 5 homophobic pogroms in downtown Tbilisi for government-critical TV Pirveli. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has included deceased cameraman Aleksandre (Lekso) Lashkarava's name in its observatory of killed journalists for the year 2021.)
8. Moving swiftly to strengthen the protection of human rights of vulnerable groups, including by bringing perpetrators and instigators of violence to justice more effectively. (Among different vulnerable groups that may be exposed to discrimination

[1] Amnesty International, "Georgia: Sentencing of pro-opposition media owner Nika Gvaramia a political motivated silencing of dissenting voice," May 17, 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/georgia-sentencing-of-pro-opposition-media-owner-nika-gvaramia-a-political-motivated-silencing-of-s-dissenting-voice/.

[2] Amnesty International, "Georgia: The authorities' Failure to Protect Tbilisi Pride Once Again Encourages Violence," July 5, 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/georgia-the-authorities-failure-to-protect-tbilisi-pride-once-again-encourages-violence/.

on diverse grounds, LGBTQI+ undoubtedly seems to be the most vulnerable in Georgia. The LGBTQI+ events regularly face significant opposition and are often cancelled due to the widespread violence. The LGBTQI+ rights activists were unable to hold their events due to violent opposition in 2012,[3] 2013,[4] 2021[5] and 2023.[6])

9. Consolidating efforts to enhance gender equality and fight violence against women. (In spite of a variety of significant legislative or institutional changes enacted and implemented, violence against women, and specifically, domestic violence remains an important challenge in Georgia.[7])
10. Ensuring the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes at all levels.
11. Adopting legislation so that Georgian courts proactively take into account European Court of Human Rights judgments in their deliberations.
12. Ensuring that an independent person is given preference in the process of nominating a new Public Defender (Ombudsperson) and that this process is conducted in a transparent manner; ensuring the Office's effective institutional independence.[8]

b) What Has Been Achieved?

Three of the Twelve Priorities have been marked as completed in the European Commission's (EC) 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy Report,[9] which became the basis for the November 8, 2023, recommendation of the EC that Georgia be granted candidate status.

The implemented priorities include:

- The consolidation of efforts to promote gender equality and combat violence against women;
- The adoption of legislation requiring Georgian courts to actively take into account judgments of the European Court of Human Rights; and

[3] Gyla.ge, "NGOs' Statement on Violation of the Right to Assembly of 'LGBT'," May 18, 2012, https://gyla.ge/en/post/print/ngos-statement-on-violation-of-the-right-to-assembly-of-lgbt-140326.

[4] Amnesty International, "Georgia: Homophobic violence mars Tbilisi Pride event," May 17, 2013, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2013/05/georgia-homophobic-violence-mars-tbilisi-pride-event/.

[5] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Anti-LGBT Protesters Attack Journalists In Tbilisi, Force Organisers To Cancel Pride Event," July 5, 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/tbilisi-georgia-lgbt-pride-march-violent-attack/31342235.html.

[6] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Tbilisi LGBT Event Forced To Cancel After Far-Right Protesters Storm Site," July 8, 2023, https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-lgbt-pride-canceled-protesters-storm-tbilisi/32494858.html.

[7] UN Women, National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT), "National Study on Violence against Women in Georgia 2022," 2023, https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/12/national-study-on-violence-against-women-in-georgia-2022-0#:~:text=The%20study%20revealed%20that%2050.1,partner%20or%20non%2Dpartner%20violence.

[8] European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: Commission Opinion on Georgia's application for membership of the European Union," June 17, 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/Georgia%20opinion%20and%20Annex.pdf, 17-18.

[9] European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy," November 8, 2023, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_690%20Communication%20on%20EU%20Enlargement%20Policy_and_Annex.pdf?fbclid=IwAR01ZKjWxItp6a9KDGKeQWqu3sD64HdOgcvIIAWyuuTBZEEI95vneLD0MwU, 24-25.

- The transparent and independent nomination process for the appointment of a new public defender (Ombudsperson).

According to the assessment provided by the EC, Georgia has taken steps to strengthen its engagement with the EU, and increased pace of reforms.

To address the Twelve Priorities identified in the Commission Opinion on its membership application, Georgia has adopted legislative acts and policy actions on gender equality, on fighting violence against women and organised crime, as well as on taking into account European Court of Human Rights judgments. A judicial reform has been brought forward, although a holistic reform of the High Council of Justice is still regarded to be needed.

Georgia has shared diverse legislation and several other core legal acts on the Election Code, Anti-Corruption Bureau, Special Investigation Services, Personal Data Protection Service, as well as its action plan for "de-oligarchisation" with the Venice Commission for an opinion. A strategy on the protection of human rights was adopted and an action plan is being elaborated. A memorandum of cooperation with civil society representatives was concluded. Building a strong cross-party political consensus would contribute to addressing polarization and accelerate Georgia's European path.

Deeper Obstacles

Along with objectively recognizing majorly from the part of broader Georgian society, however not necessarily always and to the same extent by the government, of the obstacles on its way towards the advancement of Georgia's integration with the EU, addressed by the EU Commission initially through famous 12, and more recently 9 priorities that have been set out by the institution for Georgia to be fulfilled for gaining the candidacy status, as well as for the overall full accession of the country to the EU, there are at least two other weighty factors of crucial consideration as well.

In the given context, we identify the following factors:

1. In minimum puzzling foreign policy orientation and related practical decision-making or concrete set/ sets of external, whether internal actions taken by the current government of Georgia, especially regarding Russia, that we may regard even though critical - due to sufficiently greater potential for causing risky outcomes vital for the country, but still - a variable naturally prone to the future changes under any democratic political regime with the simplest and very basic electoral system; and
2. Much complicated issue of the geopolitics of Georgia - on one hand, with favourable location of high strategic importance, i.e. connecting Asia with Europe, and basically serving as obviously very significant transportation and energy corridor through various regional and international projects already operational or planned. And on the other hands, there needs to be emphasized the areal limitations for the South Caucasian state taking into account its immediate or even broader complex neighbourhood, and opportunities existing, but also challenges being faced from security, geopolitical, and geostrategic points of view, which always require thorough consideration, even in spite of initially the European Commission's historic recommendation of November 8, 2023,

and afterwards, the European Council's also pivotal decision of December 14, 2023, to finally grant the EU candidate status to Georgia.

Long-Awaited Historic Decision As Georgia Has Been Granted The EU Candidate Status.

Due to its truly historic significance not only for Georgia, but also for the whole South Caucasus, on November 8, 2023, the European Commission finally issued its recommendation to grant the EU candidate status to Georgia. The President of the EC - Ursula von der Leyen announced the decision at the EU joint press conference dedicated to the 2023 Enlargement package and the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. The European Council was anticipated to make the decision about Georgia on granting the status in December of 2023.

The EU Ambassador to Georgia Pawel Herczynski who keeps playing a crucial role for assisting Georgia's integration within the EU successfully, held a press conference on November 8, 2023, following the European Commission's decision to recommend that Georgia be granted the EU candidate status remarkably on condition that it implements a series of reforms.

"At the same time, we should not forget that the recommendation of EU to grant candidate status is linked to fulfilment of concrete steps,"[10] which Herczynski said would be a decisive factor in the attainment of the EU candidacy. The Ambassador pointed out that constant reforms were absolutely necessary so that the country could be ready to take its place as a full member of the European Union.

Pawel Herczynski said that while the EC report acknowledged progress, it also underlined that important work kept remaining to be done in essential areas, such as rule of law, media freedom and conducting free and fair elections.

The Ambassador emphasized in addition that the report also says how important it is for Georgia to fight disinformation, "particularly disinformation targeting the EU."[11] And he added: "To do this Georgia will need to reduce political polarization."[12]

Noting that the European Commission welcomed the reform efforts undertaken by Georgia in line with the country's constitution envisaging its integration into the EU as a priority and overviewing steps taken towards the implementation of the EU 12 priorities since 2022, the EC recommended that the European Council would grant Georgia the status of a candidate country on the understanding that certain steps should be taken, including the original outstanding key conditions plus two new conditions relating to the fight against disinformation, addressing the anti-EU disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference against the EU's values and Georgia's still low alignment with the EU foreign policy.

Some of the items from the original 12 conditions list have been grouped together by the European Commission in the new list[13] provided below, in addition to the new conditions:

[10] Civil.ge, "EU Ambassador: This Is a Big Recognition from the EU, however Important Work Remains to be Done," November 8, 2023, https://civil.ge/archives/568393.
[11] *Ibidem.*
[12] *Ibidem.*
[13] European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament."

- Fight disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference against the EU and its values. (There are a number of active groups and/or public campaigns either identified or even self-identified as pro-Russian or at least loyal to Russia that are conducting massive anti-EU/ anti-Western propaganda spreading fake news, disinformation, and misinformation in order to discredit the ideas of Europe, Georgia's EU and NATO aspirations, and European or Western values, lifestyles, etc. in Georgia.[14])
- Improve Georgia's alignment with the EU common foreign and security policy. (The low and falling rate of alignment of Georgia with the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) has been recognized as one of the most pressing challenges that the former Soviet state currently faces on its path towards the EU integration and harmonization with the European and Western standards.[15])
- Further address the issue of political polarization, including through more inclusive legislative work with opposition parties in Parliament, notably on legislation related to Georgia's European integration.
- Ensure a free, fair, and competitive electoral process, notably in 2024, and fully address OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Finalize electoral reforms, including ensuring adequate representation of the electorate, well in advance of election day.
- Further improve the implementation of parliamentary oversight notably of the security services. Ensure institutional independence and impartiality of key institutions, notably the Election Administration, the National Bank, and the Communications Commission.
- Complete and implement a holistic and effective judicial reform, including comprehensive reform of the High Council of Justice and the Prosecutor's Office, fully implementing Venice Commission recommendations, and following a transparent and inclusive process.
- Further address the effectiveness and ensure the institutional independence and impartiality of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Special Investigative Service, and the Personal Data Protection Service. Address Venice Commission recommendations related to these bodies, in an inclusive process. Establish a strong track record in investigating -corruption and organised crime cases.
- Improve the current action plan to implement a multi-sectorial, systemic approach to de-oligarchisation, in line with Venice Commission recommendations and following a transparent and inclusive process involving opposition parties and civil society.
- Improve the protection of human rights including by implementing an ambitious human rights strategy and ensuring freedom of assembly and expression. Launch

[14] International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), "A Russian Informational Operation in Georgia Against the European Union," September 29, 2023, https://www.isfed.ge/eng/blogi/ganakhlebuli-rusuli-sainformatsio-operatsia-saqartveloshi-evrokavshiris-tsinaaghmdeg-.

[15] Eka Akobia, "Georgia's (mis)alignment with the EU Foreign Policy," Civil.ge, May 18, 2023, https://civil.ge/archives/542831.

impartial, effective, and timely investigations in cases of threats against safety of vulnerable groups, media professionals and civil society activists, and bring organisers and perpetrators of violence to justice. Consult and engage with civil society, allowing for their meaningful involvement in legislative and policymaking processes and ensure they can operate freely.

Finally, on December 14, 2023, the European Council has decided to grant EU candidate status to Georgia. The Council also made a decision to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and will open negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership is reached. During the voting, in what appeared to be an unprecedented case, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban did not vote and walked out of the meeting but did not block the decision. The decision taken by 26 member states, however, has been legally binding.

Conclusion

In an attempt to find out the functional reasons behind the EU decision of June 23, 2022, made for Georgia in terms of its prospects for accession to the European community, i.e. the European perspective, which differed from the candidate country status awarded to Ukraine and Moldova, we have arrived at the following conclusions:

- Along with the acknowledgment of the challenges shared broadly by the Georgian public, on its path towards the enhancement of Georgia's integration with the EU, addressed by the EU Commission through famous 12 and 9 priorities that have been drafted by the European community for Georgia to be accomplished for acquiring the candidacy status, as well as for the overall prospective and complete accession of the country to the EU, there are at least two other significant factors that require considerable attention as well:
- In any case rather confusing foreign policy orientation and relevant practical decision-making or concrete actions taken by the current political administration of Georgia having external, as well domestic implications, specifically targeting the controversial Russian factor, that due to fruitful potential for causing even directly harmful consequences essential for the country, we consider even though critical, but still - a variable logically open to the future shifts characteristic for any, even the most basic form of electoral democracy;
- Greatly complex issue of the geopolitics of Georgia - on one hand, with alluring location of high strategic value that connects Asia with Europe, and undoubtedly crucial transportation and energy corridor functions that are being implemented through various regional and international projects already operational or upcoming. And on the other hands, there needs to be underlined the areal limitations for the South Caucasian state bearing in mind it's never easy immediate or even extended neighbourhood, and chances and obstacles arising from security, geopolitical, and geostrategic dimensions, which constantly require cautious stance and thorough consideration, even in spite of such positive achievements - initially the European Commission's historic recommendation of November 8, 2023, and afterwards, the European Council's also

remarkable decision of December 14, 2023, to finally grant the EU candidate status to Georgia.

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Scenarios for the EU Enlargement Policy in the Future Post-War Context

Valentin Naumescu

Abstract. The topic of a new EU enlargement got political momentum, more than 20 years after the previous wave of optimism and interest for the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is certainly the main reason of this renewed interest. The recent opening of the negotiations for EU accession with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, in December 2023, is the best proof of the current favourable trend.
Most of the European politicians seem prepared to reassure and give messages of encouragement to the embattled Eastern Neighbourhood, especially for the pro-European Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. However, there is still a long and difficult way until a possible accession of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, not to mention Georgia, and even the discussed horizon of 2030 is not a certitude. A set of political, economic, and social variables may change in nuance (or even fundamentally) the European perspective of the Eastern Neighbourhood in the coming years. This paper explores the main scenarios of the EU's intended enlargement.

Keywords: EU enlargement, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Eastern Neighbourhood

Where are we now?

Almost two years after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the military stalemate on the Ukrainian front is associated with the Western political commitment to support Ukraine as long as it takes to resist the aggression. Despite Kremlin's hope with regard to a quick West fatigue in supporting Ukraine, the financial and military aid did not fade in 2023. On the contrary, the US, EU and UK continued to deliver arms and ammunition to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, also important financial support for the Ukrainian government. Although the Western sanctions against Russia did not prove to have immediate and powerful impact, they added a contribution to the weakening of the Russian economy and its war machine. Only at the end of the year, in December 2023, both the EU and the US had political difficulties to adopt new support packages for Ukraine[1], due to the disagreements with Viktor Orbán in the European Council, respectively with the Republicans in the House of Representatives.

There is no clear indication *when* and especially *how* this war will end. It might be going on for years and years, it can escalate and extends in the region, it can stop this year or next year, or it can continue as a frozen conflict. If it is about the enlargement of the EU in the Eastern Neighbourhood, it is self-evident that this *cannot happen during the war*.

Only in a post-war context, the EU would clearly assess the opportunity, conditions, and format of a possible enlargement. For now, these are just optimistic discussions, and everything can change in the next years. We need also to take into consideration that "enlargement" refers not only to Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia but to the

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[1] Leo Litra, "The Limits of 'As Long As It Takes': Why Ukraine's Allies Need to Update Their Strategy," European Council on Foreign Relations, December 19, 2023, https://ecfr.eu/article/the-limits-of-as-long-as-it-takes-why-ukraines-allies-need-to-update-their-strategy/.

Western Balkans as well. The momentum seems to be now for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, but this observation is before the crucial year 2024. It remains to be seen how the European and global politics will look like in 2025, after a long series of elections.

Moreover, the new approach of combining the topic of EU enlargement with the one of revisioning the EU Treaty (TEU) could be tricky. Although starting from the reasonable assumption that UE cannot function properly with 29, 30, 32 or 35 member-states (considering all candidates from the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans) keeping its unanimity principles, this emerging conditionality could become a "perfect trap" for the EU and the candidate countries while neither TEU revision nor enlargement being achieved.

Five Scenarios. From The Most Optimistic to the Darkest

Integrating global, European, regional, and national aspects regarding possible political evolutions, we identify five scenarios for the EU enlargement policy in the post-war context.

1. **First Scenario: Full Success by the End of 2030**

In this most optimistic scenario, the enlargement will be achieved in the next seven years, by the beginning of the new decade. Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and at least two or three candidates from the Western Balkans (e.g., Montenegro, North Macedonia, or Albania) will be admitted. The Accession Treaty should be signed, whether the European political conditions permit, shortly after the 2029 European elections and then allow one or two years for the national ratifications. This is the fastest and largest scenario we can imagine, taking into consideration the European political calendar, "business as usual" in European politics and no "black swan".

What are the conditions for this scenario?

First and foremost, the end of the war in Ukraine (not just an armistice with a frozen conflict) and an independent Ukraine, with clear and undisputed territories. It requires no Russian troops on the official territory of Ukraine, even this would mean a smaller Ukraine. For the EU integration, it is essential to speak about clear, independent, non-occupied territories, capable to fully enforce European legislation (the *Acquis Communautaire*).

Second, a reintegrated Transnistria within the official, recognized territory of the Republic of Moldova. Recently, President Maia Sandu made a very interesting proposal, suggesting that the Republic of Moldova could "join the EU in two steps",[2] first with the west bank of Dniester, later (nobody knows when or if…) with the left bank. This proposal has obviously two faces and it can actually be understood also as a *de facto* renouncement to Transnistria since the EU must take all necessary measures for the security of the EU Eastern border. Would Ukraine or Georgia accept the same partial territorial integration in the EU, without the occupied territories? Would the EU as a whole and the EU member states accept such a compromise? It remains to be seen, the idea is recent, and it triggers a lot of political

[2] Alina Cotoros, "Maia Sandu susține că R. Moldova ar putea adera la UE în doi pași, prima dată fără Transnistria" (Maia Sandu Says Moldova Could Join the EU in Two Steps, Firstly Without Transnistria), *Adevărul*, November 14, 2023, https://adevarul.ro/stiri-externe/republica-moldova/maia-sandu-sustine-ca-r-moldova-ar-putea-adera-la-2316068.html.

and judicial challenges. The EU High Representative and EC vice-president Josep Borrell admits that "there are precedents of Member States that became Member States having a territorial problem inside – that is the case of Cyprus".[3] The difference between North-Cyprus and Transnistria reflects however the difference between Turkey and Russia as occupants and military threats.

Third, democratic reforms and political stability in the Western Balkans and a no-surprise pro-European trajectory of the candidates who have the clearest pro-West option. Even in the most optimistic scenario, we do not see Serbia becoming a full EU member by 2030 but possibly some of the smaller countries, with less problems and a clear pro-West orientation.

Fourth, successful negotiations and closing of all 35 chapters by the end of 2028, which is a tight calendar for Ukraine and Moldova who have just started the EU accession talks and almost impossible for Georgia. For Romania and Bulgaria, in a positive and relatively calm European "political climate", with no war and no major crisis, the negotiations took five years (2000-2004) and the ratification almost two years in 25 member states.

Fifth, no veto from any of the 27 EU member states, with questionable perspectives from Hungary, Austria, Slovak Republic, or other EU member states that could switch to or confirm their Eurosceptic and populist orientations. It remains to be seen what orientation will have the new governments in the Netherlands (the coalition was not yet negotiated), Austria and Belgium, the last two having general elections in 2024, with the nationalist right-wing parties leading in the polls.

Sixth, no major change in the pro-enlargement orientation of the big four European economies having elections during this window of opportunity: the Netherlands (the new government is not invested), Germany in 2025, France and Italy in 2027.

At the end of the day, this is an *all-or-nothing* scenario, in which each of the six pre-requirements is mandatory for a full success while any failure on one side or another can ruin this scenario.

Second Scenario: Less and Later

This is still an optimistic scenario, but a moderate one. According to it, the enlargement won't be massive, and it won't happen by the end of 2030, but eventually there will be an enlargement in the next decade.

According to this scenario, the calendar of enlargement will be longer, taking *about 10-11 years,* and at the end just *two or three countries* would join the EU. As a deadline, I would mention the spring of 2034, just before the European elections of that year. The candidates should therefore sign the Accession Treaty (together or separately) by 2032, followed by a complete process of ratification.

The Republic of Moldova, Montenegro and Albania are probably the states that still can join the EU even in this moderate optimistic scenario. Georgia is also a small country, but

[3] Josep Borrell, quoted by the EEAS Press Team, "Moldova: Press Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the Launch of the EU Partnership Mission in Chisinau", 31 May 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/moldova-press-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-launch-eu-partnership-mission_en.

it is difficult to make predictions for a state where there is still no recommendation of the European Commission to open the negotiations.

For Ukraine, a big country with a large population and many economic and social problems, *the longer will be the accession negotiations the less chances to finalize talks will be for Kyiv.* The project of Turkey's EU accession is an example of a failure because of political procrastination, in which both Ankara and Brussels lost momentum in the mid-2000s, then things went from bad to worse.

After the war, the pro-Ukrainian wave of popular support and sympathy in Western societies is supposed to start to decrease and maybe stabilize at a medium level, and I would not exclude in the future the possibility to see less pro-European or more nationalist/sovereigntist governments in Kyiv. The problem of corruption will become more visible after the war. It is also not clear whether Ukraine will accept the method of "two steps integration" proposed by President Maia Sandu for her country, first without the occupied territories. The EU could create a special status for Ukraine, with some integrated fields (partial accession), especially on the economic dimension.

It is self-evident that smaller countries have better chances to be fully integrated, if they respect of course all the other conditions presented in the first scenario – a clearly sovereign and undisputed territory, no frozen conflicts, no occupation army on their territory, no alternation in government with pro-Russian parties, democratic reforms, rule of law and full success in the negotiations with the European Commission.

For the Republic of Moldova, in both optimistic scenarios, the conditions to join the EU remain related to a clear solution for Transnistria (territorial reintegration or the "two steps accession in the EU" for Chișinău and Tiraspol), political stability and continuous pro-European government, as well as no veto from any of the EU member states. The presidential election of 2024 and the parliamentary election of 2025 will be of a crucial importance for the chances of Chișinău to finalize the negotiations for EU integration in the next eight years. Once the pro-West orientation of Chișinău would be lost in the next years, the process of integration would be obviously frozen for an indefinite period.

Third Scenario. The Neutral Perspective

The third version of the future for the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood comes with a rather neutral perspective. No significant success of the EU enlargement ambitions in the next ten years, but also no failure or major crisis of the region. The *Europeanization* of the EU neighbourhood will continue, with democratic reforms, economic development, and some steps of a partial political integration, with new mechanisms, formats and structures created to accept and absorb Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, but no full admission as EU member states. The negotiations for full accession will be slow, difficult, and long. There is already a Franco-German plan made by experts which proposed a four-circles Europe, with "an inner circle, the current EU, the associate states and the European Political Community".[4]

[4] Hanke Jacob Vela, Gregorio Sorgi, "France and Germany Back Four-Speed Europe," Politico, September 19, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/france-germany-europe-enlargement-accession-ukraine/.

In this scenario, the accession perspective for the candidate countries is not officially closed but there will be no new EU member state in the next ten years. The EU will continue to speak about the necessity of enlargement and institutional reforms. To have a reference, it is enough to mention the case of Serbia, who became a candidate in 2012 and started the accession talks in 2014, but it is still far from joining the EU.

Fourth Scenario. No Enlargement Without Prior EU Reforms, Enlargement Discussions Suspended.

This is the scenario based on the conclusion that the EU can no longer accept new members before the revision of the EU Treaty. The European Parliament already voted in November 2023 with thin majority in favour of a convention on treaty changes and EU reforms, backing the Franco-German position.[5] Nevertheless, the decision is at the European Council level and most probably nothing will happen on this topic before the European elections.

In this scenario, internal pressures for political and institutional change and reforms become so powerful that they suspend (but not officially cancel) the topic of enlargement. Disagreements between the 27 EU member states will be deep and hard to be resolved. Big countries and economies from the "central core" of the Union, such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands will start to press for a "multi-speed or concentric EU", and they eventually open the discussion for revising the Lisbon Treaty (TEU).

Peripheral countries will be afraid of being even more marginalized or to become "second class member states", opposing to the idea of a new Treaty. Some countries do not accept to renounce to the principle of decisional unanimity in the Council or to the member of the College of the European Commission designated by each state, for the same reason of losing power and influence and becoming insignificant member states. The principle of unanimity is seen by these marginal states as the last resort of their national sovereignty and as a guarantee for maintain the benefits obtained after accession. These countries will be the ones who do not want to lose anything from they have got in the past. Once the conditionality of a revision of the EU Treaty would be introduced by France and Germany, the enlargement policy will leave the agenda for quite a long time.

I do not expect a swift consensus on the idea of a TEU revision and especially on a new version of the Treaty, even if an intergovernmental conference will be launched with this purpose. This process of reflection and debate could become a "perfect trap" for the EU enlargement policy. Neither TEU revision, nor EU enlargement will be achieved in this scenario in the next ten years. The condition of ratification in national referenda comes also with high risks, as we know from previous experiences.

The momentum of enlargement and reforms triggered by the war in Ukraine would be lost in never ending political controversies with regard to the future of the European Union and its new institutional architecture.

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[5] Eleonora Vasques, "EU Parliament's Slim Majority Triggers Convention on Treaties Reform," Euractiv, November 22, 2023, https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/eu-parliaments-slim-majority-triggers-convention-on-treaties-reform-centre-right-divided/.

This scenario is a moderate-pessimistic one, because even if it does not allow a new enlargement, it still keeps the Eastern Neighbourhood in the "backwaters" of the European Union, not of Russia. Neither the EU nor the Eastern Neighbourhood are externally threatened by major crises or by an extension of the war in Ukraine, and the only reason for the failure of enlargement are the internal political disagreements between the visions and interests of the member states regarding the future of the European Union.

The main difference between the third and the fourth scenarios is given by the undecided, respectively the decided verdict regarding the EU enlargement. In the third version, it will still not be clear after the next ten years whether there will be an enlargement or not, while in the fourth scenario the topic is closed until a new EU Treaty.

Fifth Scenario. Defeat and Complete Failure

Russia succeeds in this war to block the pro-European perspective of the Eastern candidates and/or the EU fails in a deep political crisis, amidst a deterioration of the world order. Deep political, social, and ideological cleavages would erupt in the EU, dividing our democracies. It remains to be seen whether Russia would also succeed to destabilize Republic of Moldova or the Western Balkans. A new US administration starting in January 2025, possibly led by Donald Trump, will gradually reduce the military support for Ukraine.

"Re-capturing" Ukraine and Moldova by Russian military or with hybrid instruments (political, economic, intelligence, disinformation, energy etc.) could demoralize the EU in continuing its enlargement ambitions and make these ambitions useless.

In the eventuality of terrorist attacks in the coming months as a result of the Islamist factions' resurrection in the EU countries, the vote for the European Parliament in June 2024 could be significantly pushed towards nationalist, protectionist and obviously anti-migration parties. There are already signs that the ECR Group (European Conservatives and Reformists) and ID (Identity and Democracy) could grow and become more prominent, having an influence in the next EU strategies and policies. These parties are not only anti-migration but also reluctant to the continuation of the support for Ukraine.

As for the US presidential elections, the eventuality of a return to White House of the former president Trump or another hard-liner conservative would possibly weaken the US military and financial support for Ukraine, with major consequences in the war.

There could be several sub-versions of this most pessimistic scenario, from a major war to a deep crisis of the EU or of the West as a whole. This differentiation is less important for the EU enlargement perspective since all of these sub-versions would make any enlargement impossible and come with a severe deterioration of the European political climate. Obviously, this one would be the "catastrophic" political scenario.

Conclusion

Analysing the spectrum of these five scenarios in the context of the two present wars and multiple crises in international politics, we see that the first two of them are optimistic (fully optimistic or moderate-optimistic), one is neutral and undecided but we still "can live

with it", while two pessimistic versions of the future do not give chances to further EU enlargement towards East.

The differences between each of two successive scenarios may not seem important (e.g., from the third to the fourth) but just nuances. However, the overall perspectives of the EU enlargement policy cover a large range of possibilities, from full success to a total failure. Any reasonable assessment tells us that the *highest level of probability is for the in-between scenarios* (no. 2-4), but none of them can be excluded.

What exactly will decide which scenario will become a reality? In essence, it is about the dynamics of the *European political agenda*. Agenda setting in Brussels is always a matter of combining political rationality with emotions of the public opinion. Both can change rapidly, depending on external and internal developments. It seems a paradox but the war in Ukraine opened a window of opportunity to relaunch the discussion on EU enlargement. Whether this window of opportunity will be used with positive results for the EU and the Eastern Neighbourhood, or it will close before any achievement of the enlargement policy, it remains to be seen in the next ten years.

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The Bulgarian-Romanian Mini-Schengen Area As a Project For Change in South-eastern Europe

Vladimir Mitev

Abstract. In the conditions of continuous lack of political will for Bulgaria and Romania's accession to the Schengen area, a curious idea is slowly gaining support among diverse actors in the two countries - the Bulgarian-Romanian mini-Schengen. Some say that if successfully applied, it could demonstrate the two countries can manage borders without control and will show how countries of the periphery cooperate, thus overcoming their peripheral status of eternal mutual competition. Others view the mini-Schengen as an initiative that would strengthen the peripheral status of the two countries and thus it is seen negatively.
This paper gathers different perspectives from the two countries and on the basis of social constructivist and liberal theories of international relations advances a wider proposal for change in South-eastern Europe on the basis of opening up to the neighbour, active peace and trust building, dynamic identity and culture of building bridges of friendship. It aims to offer ideas for further debate on how Bulgarians and Romanians could become to a greater extent subjects of regional and international relations.

Keywords: mini-Schengen area, Romania, Bulgaria, war in Ukraine, south-eastern Europe

Introduction

The war in Ukraine is a catalyst for change in international relations on the eastern flank of NATO and the eastern part of the EU - Central and South-eastern Europe. In South-eastern Europe, this means in particular a growing media interest in what is happening in neighbouring countries, an increased interest in infrastructure links between them, a push for energy cooperation and other measures leading to the reaffirmation of regional cooperation in the region. But these positive trends, which are elite-driven and part of the agenda for the region of their Western partners, run counter to the inertia of many years in which both the elites and the people of Bulgaria and Romania have been encouraged to view their neighbours with reticence, suspicion or indifference.

How could positive change based on regional cooperation and cross-border engagement in international relations reach the depths of South-eastern Europe's societies?

This paper attempts to answer this key question by offering a series of perspectives and analyses on the proposal for the abolition of border controls between the EU and the South-eastern European Schengen members (previously referred to as a mini-Schengen, a concept that became obsolete when Bulgaria and Romania joined the Schengen area in April 2024 - but I still use it as I study it historically and as a spirit). In the first part of the text, which acts as a kind of "literature review", the evolution of the idea of a mini-Schengen is reviewed - from its first formulation by a Romanian commentator associated with the UNDP to its latest reincarnation as a mini-Schengen between Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. The second part

examines the international context of this news. The final part sets out some key elements of a broader perspective on people-driven change in South-eastern Europe.

The main thesis of the publication is that under the conditions of only partial accession to the Schengen area for Bulgaria and Romania (which, according to the decision of the Council of the European Union of 30 December 2023 - supplemented by a joint declaration of the two countries with Austria - will be admitted to the Schengen area in a first stage only via the air and sea borders, but not with their land borders), a new perspective on people-led change in South-Eastern Europe is emerging: namely that a mini-Schengen with land borders in Southeast Europe could be one of the elements that could promote greater economic dynamism, people-to-people relations, confidence-building and increase the potential of bilateral and regional relations in Southeast Europe. And even if such a project might not be easily technically possible or may not be politically desired, its spirit is still a force for change in the region.

The main questions that this mini-study reflects upon are, on the one hand, related to the existence or lack of political will, public interest, and legal right to introduce a mini-Schengen area in South-eastern Europe for the land borders and, on the other hand, to the effects of such a political innovation on the regional political and people-to-people relations. The research approach I use is desk research.

Most of the research resources are articles and interviews in the press on the issues of the mini-Schengen. Many articles from the Bulgarian-Romanian blog "The Bridge of Friendship" are used as primary sources. Statements by politicians or experts to the media in Romanian and European media are also used.

The significance of the topic lies in the fact that Bulgarian-Romanian relations have not been popular among researchers for a long time, and only the changing international context has led to a growing interest in them. The present publication could contribute to the affirmation of a field of knowledge in the media or in academic journals on Bulgarian-Romanian political issues. The discourses that view the two countries as a package may not be what their national elites would generally like to hear, but it is part of the wider process of Europeanisation, in which countries with socio-political, geographical, or cultural similarities usually develop a commonality on various EU issues and a specific regional identity in the EU. Approaching Bulgaria and Romania as a group is a way of challenging the national-centric thinking of their political and analytical elites, who should appreciate proposals for greater political imagination in regional politics, or at least find the best arguments to explain why change is so slow in their bilateral relations.

The evolution of the proposal for a Bulgarian-Romanian mini-Schengen

First formulations

Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, giving them the right to join the Schengen area as soon as they meet the technical requirements. They managed to do so in 2011. However, their membership was blocked due to a lack of political support from the Netherlands and Finland. After that Bulgaria and Romania's accession to the EU has been off the agenda of the EU's Council of Home Affairs Ministers for 11 years.

The idea for a Bulgarian-Romanian mini-Schengen was first articulated in 2011 by the blog The Rational Idealist, which belongs to an anonymous Romanian commentator with a degree in political science who was working for the UNDP at the time. The blog has a small readership, including the Romanian good governance expert Codru Vrabie, who put forward the same idea in 2014 in an interview with Vladimir Mitev for Tema Magazine (Bulgaria).

This is the first known proposal for a mini-Schengen made by the author of the Rational Idealist blog:[1] "First of all, a decision by Romania and Bulgaria to create a kind of mini-Schengen between them by abolishing the common border would send a strong signal of confidence to their European partners. We want the rest of the Schengen countries to have confidence in our countries' ability to manage the external borders that will become common. By abolishing the border between them, Romania and Bulgaria would show that they trust each other. Secondly, such an initiative would demonstrate the two countries' firm will to integrate and their ability to assume the responsibilities that this entails, not in a confrontational way, but in a constructive way that helps the EU rather than undermining it. It would allow Romania and Bulgaria to take the initiative on this issue in a much more effective and convincing way than any retaliatory measures (which only feed the downward spiral of the disintegration of the European project). It would teach the Eurosceptics a lesson and would certainly have the support of the European Commission. What better way to prove that we are capable of managing the Union's external borders together with Bulgaria than to do so first under our own responsibility? On the contrary, by implementing in advance one of the main components of the Schengen accession process, Bulgaria and Romania would make their lives easier later, with only Bulgaria's border controls with Greece and Romania's with Hungary to be abolished. The Romanian-Bulgarian border is the longest at 631 km, compared to 448 km between Romania and Hungary and 494 km between Bulgaria and Greece. The abolition of controls at the longest of the three borders envisaged for eventual Schengen integration could technically be managed as an intermediate step in the process. From the point of view of feasibility, there should be no problem, since this border was originally scheduled to disappear by March 2011, the target date for Romania and Bulgaria's entry into the Schengen area. On the contrary, the dismissal or transfer of the relevant staff at the border crossing points, the decommissioning of equipment, etc. will bring savings for the budgets of the two countries and allow them to focus on better securing the external borders. From the point of view of the population and the local communities, I do not believe that anyone will suffer from the disappearance of this border, which over time has acquired a sad reputation as a hotbed of corruption and mutual kicking. For some years now, Romanians from the south have been crossing the Danube in large numbers to do their shopping or to spend their holidays on the Bulgarian coast, even going so far as to take initiatives such as subtitling films in Romanian in some Bulgarian cinemas in order to attract viewers from our country. In short, such a Romanian-Bulgarian response to the probable rejection tomorrow of their Schengen candidacy would project an image of partnership, responsibility, seriousness and initiative of the two countries, in contrast to the

[1] Rational Idealist, "Schengen - o idee constructiva pentru Romania si Bulgaria (RO)" (Schengen – a constructive idea for Romania and Bulgaria), September 21, 2011, https://rational-idealist.blogspot.com/2011/09/schengen-o-idee-constructiva-pentru.html.

pitiful impression left by the first nervous reactions to the news of the Dutch opposition. It would be a response in the spirit of Europe, not the spirit of the Balkans. For Romania's European policy, which has been caught on the wrong foot in recent years, such a creative retreat would be a long-awaited sign of vision, consistency, and courage."

This is what Codru Vrabie said in 2014 to the Bulgarian Tema magazine: "We have problems with Schengen in both Romania and Bulgaria. Our governments meet from time to time in Ruse, in Vidin and I do not know where else. But at these meetings they have never talked about a Schengen-type experiment on our border. To show that they trust each other and to abolish the border between us. Then, in the form of cooperation between Romania and Bulgaria, we will show that we trust each other, and we will show all the other countries in the region that Schengen can work here. If it works for us, why should it not work for relations with other EU countries? But nobody is thinking about it strategically because we do not trust each other."[2]

The Media Interest Increases

Media interest in the idea is growing after 2019, when Croatia will have met the technical requirements to join the Schengen area, while Bulgaria and Romania still have no clear prospect of joining.

Codru Vrabie gives a new interview to a Bulgarian media outlet - the Bulgarian-Romanian blog "The Bridge of Friendship" - in which he claims that the mini-Schengen between the two countries is a good idea: "I would say that an agreement of the Schengen type shows a high level of trust between the partner countries. Each of them has confidence in the other's ability and capacity to protect a certain part of the border, and in return can better protect the other borders. The immediate advantage is that, with relatively the same resources, a state can concentrate on a smaller segment of entry checkpoints and therefore be more efficient. The disadvantage is that each state has to invest in the resources and capacities of the partners of the agreement, even if we are only talking about evaluation missions. At the time - 4-5 years after our countries joined the EU - I thought it was a very good idea. Both countries believed that they met the technical standards, that they had the ability and the capacity to join Schengen, but they didn't have the confidence of the other European states. So, it seemed a good idea to show that at least Romania and Bulgaria can abolish the border on the Danube. This would show the other European countries that Romania and Bulgaria are indeed ready to join Schengen. It would also be the first sign that our countries understand what European integration means in a bilateral sense, not just in relation to Brussels. However, in 2019, I think that the mini-Schengen in the Western Balkans is more interesting than the one that could exist between Romania and Bulgaria."[3]

Vrabie claims that our region looks too much to the West and its countries fail to integrate and synchronise with each other. Instead, they still seem to be thinking in terms of the 19th century, when it was important to be in one or another sphere of influence and to

[2] Vladimir Mitev, "Codru Vrabie: The Romanian-Bulgarian Mini-Schengen Seems a Good Idea," The Bridge of Friendship, December 18, 2022, https://friendshipbridge.eu/2019/10/29/vrabie-schengen-en.
[3] *Ibidem.*

compete for the attention of the big powers in the EU: "From this point of view, it seems to me that Bucharest ignores its relationship with Sofia, just as it ignores its relationship with Ljubljana, Helsinki, Lisbon or Copenhagen. I think that Sofia is doing the same in the opposite direction. If our states don't support or encourage in any way direct cross-border cooperation, we will not have any substantial European integration. The road from Varna to Brussels or from Suceava to Athens depends on this integration. That is why I am talking about a lack of common sense. We can imagine that we can travel by plane, but the cow's milk or the sheep need cheaper means of transport. The good practices of the local administration in Varna can be applied in Suceava, but only if people meet, get to know each other, discuss, share their problems, needs and aspirations. Only then will we be able to say that we are working together to find mutually beneficial solutions - that is why European integration has been successful. This spirit of cooperation could only emerge of its own accord if the states supported and encouraged the existence and emergence of a means of communication. But our politicians, driven by an understandable inferiority complex, believe that only lessons from the Germans are valuable. This is a lack of practical common sense. The Germans (the French and the Swedes) no longer have problems like ours to solve. We, the Romanians, the Bulgarians, the Greeks, the Croats, the Baltics have these problems. But I don't see anybody - either in Sofia or in Bucharest - taking care of them, so that we could open up to each other, to forms of cooperation between people. Even with the bridges over the Danube, we haven't achieved much," says Vrabie.[4]

In essence, Vrabie is drawing a direct link between the removal of border controls between the two countries and the promotion of people-to-people engagement between them as a way of achieving real Europeanisation. In his view, this is a way of overcoming the status of peripheral countries and achieving a level of synchronisation that Germany and France - countries at the core of the EU - have already achieved.

Vrabie expects that a mini-Schengen would increase people and economic exchanges between Bulgaria and Romania. As for some negative aspects - such as cross-border crime - the two countries' law enforcement institutions would have to learn to work together and trust each other, practising on a smaller scale what they would do in the Schengen area.

Since 2019, a number of interviews on the mini-Schengen proposal have been published on the Bridge of Friendship. The general impression is that no one in Bulgarian foreign policy circles is interested in the idea of a mini-Schengen.[5] Some Bulgarian experts even refuse to publicly articulate a negative stance on it, fearing that just talking about it would legitimise the proposal, which in their view could potentially be used against Bulgaria. One way of looking at this scepticism is to take into account the Bulgarian elites' obsession with national-centred thinking about their foreign policy. The only positive opinion publicly articulated by Bulgarians was that of the maverick foreign policy and security expert prof. Vladimir Chukov, who recalled that he had been promoting the idea of a mini-Schengen in the Bulgarian context

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[4] *Ibidem.*

[5] *Idem*, "Vessela Tcherneva: It Is Somewhat Strange to Make an Announcement for a Strategic Partnership with Romania When There Is No Regular Parliament and Government," The Bridge of Friendship, March 16, 2023, https://friendshipbridge.eu/2023/03/15/tcherneva-strategic-partnership-en/.

for years.[6] In his view, however, this initiative should also include Greece and be linked to broader political integration between the three EU members in South-eastern Europe - e.g. between their parliaments, markets, and so on.

At the same time, there is a general feeling that Romanian foreign policy elites are more open to the idea, even if it has been less articulated by heavyweight analysts or politicians. However, several MEPs from both sides of the aisle have rallied behind it.

A Boom of the Discourse after 2022

The new impetus in the media discussion about the mini-Schengen came after the 8 December Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council, which blocked Bulgaria and Romania from joining the Schengen area, with the Netherlands and Austria blocking them over issues related to migration and justice. The National Union of Romanian Road Transport Operators (UNTRR)[7] and the Bulgarian Chamber of Road Transport Operators (KAPB)[8] immediately came up with proposals to remove border controls between the two countries. The two employers' organisations stated that their truck drivers generate expenses, pollution, losses and risk their safety and that of others while they are forced to wait for days to cross the borders of Bulgaria and Romania. In addition, several experts and officials said that the two countries are excluded from the major investment flows in the region because investors take into account the potential delays at the border.

Following the December 2022 decision, former Romanian energy minister Răzvan Nicolescu's energy and ecology NGO initiated a petition, which was transformed into a European Parliament resolution in mid-2022,[9] criticising Austria for its lack of cooperation and abuse of the EU treaties' core principles of trust and goodwill regarding its stance on Bulgaria and Romania's accession to the Schengen area. The EP resolution, which was supported by a large majority, condemned the air pollution caused by border controls and authorised further legal action at the EU Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

Răzvan Nicolescu announced in October 2022 that his NGO had attacked the EU Council's decision not to include Romania's accession to the Schengen area on its agenda in this court, thus requesting a revision of the JHA decision of December 2022.[10]

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[6] *Idem*, "Vladimir Chukov: We Need Strong Cooperation between Greece, Romania and Bulgaria," The Bridge of Friendship, December 18, 2022, https://friendshipbridge.eu/2019/10/31/chukov-schengen-en/.

[7] *Idem*, "Radu Dinescu: A Bulgarian-Romanian Mini-Schengen Will Show That We Trust Each Other," The Bridge of Friendship, December 21, 2022, https://friendshipbridge.eu/2022/12/14/dinescu-schengen-en/.

[8] *Idem*, "Dimitar Dimitrov: Our Lawyers Tell Us That Bulgaria and Romania Have Every Right to Abolish Border Controls between Them," The Bridge of Friendship, December 21, 2022, https://friendshipbridge.eu/2022/12/19/dimitrov-schengen-en/.

[9] An interview on the Romanian petition, recognized by an European Parliament resolution, that builds up political pressure Austria over its veto for the two countries over Schengen, read more in Vladimir Mitev, "More than 80% of MEPs Condemned the Austrian Veto against Romania and Bulgaria over Schengen," The Bridge of Friendship, July 14, 2023, https://friendshipbridge.eu/2023/07/15/nicolescu-schengen-en/.

[10] Alexandru Mihăescu, "O asociație ccondusă de fostul ministru al energiei Răzvan Nicolescu anunță că va cere la curtea de justiție a UE un nou vot pentru aderarea României la Schengen. Motivul este impactul asupra mediului" (An association led by former energy minister Răzvan Nicolescu announces that they will ask the EU Court of Justice to rule on a new vote for Romania's entry into Schengen. The reason is the impact on the environment), G4Media.ro, October 16, 2023, https://www.g4media.ro/o-asociatie-condusa-de-fostul-ministru-

Earlier, the NGO Association for Clean Energy and Climate Change submitted a request to the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU to review the decision to postpone Romania's accession to the Schengen area, based on the Aarhus Convention and the fact that the JHA Council of 8 December 2022 did not take into account environmental aspects when deciding that Romania should not join the Schengen area. As the General Secretariat of the EU Council rejected the request for review, the association decided to lodge a complaint with the EU Court of Justice.

Today it is no longer a mini-Schengen but "elimination of land borders controls" in South-eastern Europe

Meanwhile, the wider EU context has changed for the better. At the EU level, there was a desire to resolve outstanding conflicts as the EU moved towards further enlargement and reform and needed to resolve its internal problems. Thus, in December 2023, the Netherlands lifted its veto in Bulgaria. At the same time, Austria appeared to be open to admitting the two South-eastern European countries via the so-called Air Schengen (accession via air borders). As a result of the negotiations, an agreement was reached on 30 December 2023 between Austria, Bulgaria and Romania, according to which the two countries would join the Schengen area as of April 2024, would have the right to issue Schengen visas, and would have border crossing without controls via air and sea borders, but border controls at the land borders with other Schengen members would remain in force for each of the countries and would be strengthened.[11]

In this situation of "partial Schengen", Romanian MEPs from the Renew Europe group - Dacian Cioloș and Vlad Gheorghe, MEP from the European People's Party George Kyrtsos and the member of the Bulgarian national parliament Daniel Laurer from the We Continue the Change party proposed on 25th January 2024 the abolition of border controls between the three countries. They explained that the proposal would benefit tourism and transport and would show Austria that there would be no increase in migration.

However, there is a technical or legal aspect of the proposal that remains unclear. On the one hand, the European Commission doesn't take an official position on the proposal, just as its answer to a question from MEP Marian-Jean Marinescu about the Bulgarian-Romanian mini-Schengen in 2023 remained vague.[12] On the other hand, the agreement with Austria of 30 December 2024 foresees the strengthening of border controls between Bulgaria and Romania.

In this context, Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov says that the abolition of border controls would be illegal under EU law.[13] Romanian transport commissioner Adina

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al-energiei-razvan-nicolescu-anunta-ca-va-cere-la-curtea-de-justitie-a-ue-un-nou-vot-pentru-aderarea-romaniei-la-schengen-motivul-este-impactul-asupra-mediului.html.

[11] Vladimir Mitev, "Council Decision on the Full Application of the Schengen Acquis in the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania," The Bridge of Friendship, January 1, 2024. https://friendshipbridge.eu/2024/01/01/cm-5950-23-en/.

[12] European Parliament. "Parliamentary Question | Answer for Question E-004057/22 | E-004057/2022(ASW)," Accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2022-004057-ASW_EN.html.

[13] Krassen Nikolov, Sofia Mandilara, "Bulgaria, Romania, Greece 'Mini Schengen' Would Be Illegal, Says Denkov," Euractiv, February 2, 2024, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/bulgaria-romania-greece-mini-schengen-would-be-illegal-says-denkov/.

Vălean, for her part, has criticised the proposal on the grounds that its application would create huge pressure on the Romanian-Hungarian border.

Even if it seems that the proposal for a Bulgarian-Romanian mini-Schengen is effectively frozen at this stage, it is clear that the proposal has gained some importance, since it had to be rejected by a prime minister and a euro commissioner (speaking in a personal capacity) in order to be stopped - for the time being. But it is also important what Vălean did not say - for example, that she didn't reject the proposal for lack of legal grounds. And the European Commission as such has not yet taken an official position. The proposal is further complicated by the fact that the joint declaration by Austria, Romania and Bulgaria meant tighter border controls at the Bulgarian-Romanian border - the opposite of the abolition of border controls.

In this context, the idea of a mini-Schengen could be a way of putting pressure on sceptics of the two countries' full membership of the EU's borderless travel zone, until the land borders of Bulgaria and Romania have been completed. But even if its legal and technical grounds are complex,[14] and even if it needs more political support to become a reality, its spirit should also be taken into account, because it carries a message and energy of people's empowerment. The spirit of the mini-Schengen is easier to understand and appreciate when we look at the international context in which this proposal is being advanced and is already playing a role.

International Context

There is a feeling that the Schengen issue is one of the issues that demonstrates the specific geopolitical position of Bulgaria and Romania. The two countries have strategic partnerships with the US but need visas to get there. They are members of the EU, but they are not in the eurozone. They have been part of the Schengen area since April 2024, but have not entered via land borders. Therefore, despite the general tendency towards Europeanisation and Westernisation, the two countries still form a specific group of countries in international relations within the EU, reflecting the heterogeneous geopolitical influence within them.

The war in Ukraine triggered a series of geopolitical transformations in South-eastern Europe that directly affected Bulgaria and Romania. Troops from NATO allies have been deployed in both countries, with France taking the lead in Romania and Italy in Bulgaria.

The push for greater infrastructural connectivity is another enduring trend. Work on a second Danube bridge at Ruse-Giurgiu, the construction of motorways in both countries and talk of better rail links between Greek Aegean ports and Bulgarian and Romanian Black Sea ports have been on the agenda for several years.

NATO needs better and faster infrastructure links so that its troops can deploy and respond more quickly. But the people of these countries will also benefit from better roads, railways, and ports. The Three Seas Initiative, with its Rail2Sea and Via Carpatia infrastructure projects, is part of this trend.

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[14] Vladimir Mitev, "Elimination of Border Controls between Bulgaria, Romania and Greece Is Technically Complex," The Bridge of Friendship, February 17, 2024, https://friendshipbridge.eu/2024/02/01/simeonova-border-controls-en/.

The Mini-Schengen Proposal in this International Context

In this context, it can be seen that bilateral and regional ties are becoming more dynamic. And Bulgaria and Romania may need projects, initiatives and approaches that encourage their citizens to get to know each other and do more together. As I write in my study "Romania's Foreign Policy in Geopolitical Context and Bulgaria"[15] the efforts of the elites of the two countries to promote bilateral and regional cooperation might remain limited in their effect if the population of the two countries is not involved on a larger scale.

Romanian-Bulgarian relations have long been characterised by indifference and national-centric thinking, which has made it difficult to reach mutually beneficial agreements. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge, interest or trust between the people of the two countries, while elites are limited by bureaucratic procedures and narrow interpretation of national interest and so far, cannot achieve a great openness between the two countries.

Therefore, change in Romanian-Bulgarian relations will come from the people, who can be much more flexible and creative when dealing with each other and cannot carry the great burden of hierarchy or hegemony. By pursuing mutually beneficial engagement, people in Bulgaria and Romania can get to know each other better, increase mutual trust and the potential of bilateral and regional relations. And when the potential in relations is greater, any policy of rapprochement can have greater depth and better results.

Mini-Schengen with the abolition of land border controls or joining the Schengen area with land borders can be an element for such a trend, which encourages travel, cultural, academic, and civil contracts between South-East European nations. It could also be a way for Bulgaria and Romania to move towards self-determination, to rely more on their regional resources rather than basing their foreign policy on attracting a big brother as a temporary patron and thinking of themselves as eternal small brothers or satellites.

Even if the mini-Schengen remains unassumed by the Bulgarian and Romanian political elites, as is the case, the spirit of this initiative, the idea of no border controls between Bulgaria and Romania, can have a powerful empowering effect on their populations. These two countries and their populations continue to be a special group in the EU, even if their national-centric elites are not happy with it and do not recognise or rely on it.

The mini-Schengen spirit would mean a move away from national-centric thinking based on hegemony and some form of static national identity. It would allow the formation of a dynamic Bulgarian-Romanian and regional identity, an identity in which the different elements approach each other without hegemony and enrich each other. And such an identity could bring a lot of energy to the region, allowing it to transform its geopolitical status.

If not the letter, then the spirit of the mini-Schengen could be a great engine of change in the semi-peripheral region of Southeast Europe.

[15] *Idem*, "Now Online: The Study on Romanian Foreign Policy and Bulgarian-Romanian Relations, Printed by the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute," The Bridge of Friendship, November 12, 2023, https://friendshipbridge.eu/2023/11/12/ro-bg-study-en/.

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The Black Sea. Searching for the Lost Hegemon

Dorin Popescu

Abstract. The current Russian design for the Black Sea implies the existence and use of certain strategic resources and reserves that accompany and embody, in the medium and long run, Moscow's power projection. Based on existing analytical data, it appears that Moscow has the necessary resources to keep some of the territories it is temporarily occupying in Ukraine under its control. However, its (much) larger territorial ambitions, in Ukraine and the wider region, cannot be sustained in the medium and long run. This Russian hegemonic project has already missed its strategic target of reconfiguring Moscow's hegemonic profile on a global scale. The regional stakes of this project are still in play.

Keywords: Black sea, hegemony, Russia, Ukraine, war

Russia's Hegemonic Project at the Black Sea. Resource Analysis

Until the fall of the Soviet Union, Moscow played an undisputed hegemonic role in the Black Sea region. The presence of Turkey, a NATO member state, in the region was not enough to prevent Moscow from carrying out this role.

However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Moscow consistently lost its hegemony. In the Black Sea region, the consolidation of the Northern Alliance's military capabilities (after the NATO accession of Romania and Bulgaria) and the expansion of the EU's political capabilities have gradually, constantly, and irreversibly, reduced Moscow's hegemony.

Thus, the Black Sea has lost its sole hegemon.[1] The fact that several countries in the region, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, even Armenia and Azerbaijan broke free of Russian influence dealt a considerable, even mortal blow to the hegemonic capabilities of the USSR and of post-USSR Russia in the region.

Meanwhile, there is no new hegemon in the wider Black Sea region. The West and Russia are sharing and complementarily take on partial hegemonic roles, without explicitly agreeing on this issue – at least in the last two decades. Other states from outside the region (the US, China) have increased their presence, influence, and control in the region, without having a real chance to alter the region's relative hegemonic balance. The West plays its partial

[1] But, for Russia, the Black Sea has never lost its strategic, even paradigmatic relevance: "This territory, which has been a priority for all Russian regimes at least since the time of Catherine the Great, has become in the last 25-30 years a theatre of confrontation between Russia's logic of maintaining its own influence and the Euro-Atlantic logic of expansion, but Russia can now bring it again into its sphere of influence. Winning back this outpost implies impactful geopolitical actions and focusing one's efforts in this sense. The Russian Federation has undertaken geopolitical moves in the Black Sea region because it sees here the corridor of Euro-Atlantic strategic advancement towards the traditional regions within its own sphere of influence and its own borders, which represents the perfect future threat for Russia's geopolitical isolation. Unlike Central Asia or the Caspian Sea region, where geopolitical tensions and/or the long-term effects are less considerable, the Black Sea region is the cordon sanitaire which must be protected, from the perspective of Kremlin's strategic interests." Dorin Popescu, "Eseu geopolitic despre narativele iliberale" (Geopolitical essay on illiberal narratives), in *Captivi la Pontul Hibrid. Studii și eseuri geopolitice*, (Prisoners at the Hybrid Pontus. Geopolitical studies and Essays) (editor Dorin Popescu), volume published under the aegis of the Black Sea House Association Constanţa, Bucharest: Ideea Europeană, History of Mentalities collection, 2020, pp. 28-29.

hegemonic role in a layered and multiple manner through the EU and NATO member states. Russia's partial hegemonic role is carried out autonomously.

In the past few years, Turkey has also systematically tried to take on a hegemonic role in the region[2] different from the Western one. This tendency is currently being manifested at the time of writing. However, Ankara does not have enough resources to undertake a hegemonic role equal to the impact and scope of the dominant regional hegemonic profiles (the West and Russia), its space for action being limited to the Southern Caucasus (Azerbaijan).[3]

In this context, the main contesting, revisionist actor of the hegemonic balance in the Black Sea region is the Russian Federation. The large-scale war it started against Ukraine, correlated with the hybrid war against the West, represent a first manifestation of the Russian Federation's paradigmatic geopolitical project to regain its position as sole hegemon at the Back Sea. From this perspective, the war against Ukraine is a means to regain its lost hegemony through force.[4]

I have explained in detail Russia's hegemonic project (on a regional and global scale) in several previous studies.[5]

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[2] "The Black Sea has been and still is close to the centre of the historical and modern great power competition. The Black Sea represents an essential target zone for any potential Eurasian hegemon." George Scutaru, Seth Cropsey, Harry Halem, and Antonia Colibășanu, "Strategic Nexus: The Black Sea, Great Power Competition, and the Russo-Ukrainian War", Yorktown Institute and New Strategy Centre, 2023, https://newstrategycentre.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/YI_NSC_Monograph.pdf, pp. 18-19.

[3] "Turkey's hesitation to commit itself exclusively to one side is fuelled by President Erdogan's regional aims, as well as by the instability of the geographic neighbourhood. The policy of diplomatic ramifications promoted by President Erdogan is perceived as being extremely controversial in the West. So, are we talking about an act of diplomatic mastery or about a disengagement related to the West? The consequences of Turkey's distancing from the partners it needs the most make it more vulnerable, leading to certain potential scenarios concerning the dynamic of power and the dependences in the wider Black Sea region." Silviu Nate, "Identitatea geopolitică a Turciei între balansare strategică regională și decuplare transatlantică" (Turkey's geopolitical identity between strategic regional balancing and transatlantic decoupling), in *Turcia la Centenar. Quo Vadis?* (Turkey's Centennial. Quo Vadis?), edited by Ioana-Constantin-Bercean and Matei Blănaru, Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale "Ion I. C. Brătianu", LARICS Collection, 2023, pp. 114-116.

[4] The nature and objective of this war were correctly understood by several analysts (including this author) from the very start of the invasion: "There are already several certainties after the first month of war. The Moscow regime started a geopolitical, hegemonic war against Western civilisation, a war to reshape the world order, a war against the current system of international relations. The new Russian narratives are further and further removed from the de-Nazification stories we woke up to on the morning of February 24, which threw us into Moscow's vitriolic underworld. Russian officials kept pushing these layered narratives which confirm Russia's hybrid war against the West, a war that takes on conventional forms against Ukraine (in order to forever stifle Kyiv's pro-Western orientation) and hybrid forms across all possible geographic coordinates The war in Ukraine should have been a show of force from a state actor hungry for geopolitical payback. Dorin Popescu, „URSS 2.0 – ieșirea din scenă și din istorie" (USSR 2.0 - Exiting the stage and history), Spotmedia, March 23, 2023, https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/opinii-si-analize/urss-2-0-iesirea-din-scena-si-din-istorie.

[5] "Russia: Back to Utopia: Escaping the Long Siberian Winter", in Valentin Naumescu (ed.), *Great Powers' Foreign Policy. Approaching the Global Competition and the Russian War against the West*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2023, pp. 300-329; "Proiecte și proiecții de putere la Marea Neagră" (Projects and power projections at the Black Sea) and "Rubiconul de la Pont. Matrioșka hegemonica a Rusiei în regiunea extinsă a Mării Negre" (The Rubicon on the Pontus. Russia's hegemonic matryoshka in the wider Black Sea area), in the collective volume *Marea Neagră. În căutarea hegemonului pierdut* (The Black Sea. Searching for the Lost Hegemon) (editor Dorin Popescu), to be printed by Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House.

By starting this hegemonic project, the political leadership in Moscow[6] estimates that the Russian Federation has enough resources, tools, and methods to carry it out and, practically, stop its own hegemonic decline.[7]

Two years after the large-scale invasion of Ukraine and ten years after the de facto start of this hegemonic war, in 2014, we can observe that this Lubianka assessment, assumed by the Kremlin, will have been partially corrected.

The main tool that forms the basis of Moscow's current hegemonic project is military force. One can see, from corroborating public data, that Moscow has mobilised over one million troops in the first two years of war against Ukraine, an impressive level of "cannon fodder" plenary engaged in reaching the envisaged objectives.

The start of the large-scale invasion in February 2022 was done by involving at least 130,000 soldiers in direct military confrontations. In December 2023, President Putin announced that there are 617,000 people are mobilised and active on the front (in the conflict zone). If we add to this the human losses suffered in the first two years since the invasion (and previously, during the military confrontations to occupy the Donetsk and Luhansk regions[8]), as well as the troops engaged in maintaining the occupation in the forcibly conquered territories in Southern and Eastern Ukraine, we reach the estimated number of at least one million troops directly involved in the war in Ukraine. An impressive number of mobilised troops can be called up to the front without major social unrest. The number of Russian Army troops already surpass 1.15 million people (military personnel and civil contractors), and the Moscow's ambitions concerning the increase of troops are constantly amplified; the current objective is reaching 1.5 million people hired by the armed forced by 2026 (combat personnel – professional soldiers contracted and recruited).

A correlated resource is the technical and military support, the supply of weapons and technology for the troops, as well as the capacity of military-industrial complex to provide for the war effort in the short, medium, and long run. Despite the estimates concerning the long-range missiles stocks, ballistic missile stocks and strategic armaments in a broader sense, capable of making a visible difference on the battlefield, the Russian Federation has converted to a war economy without major difficulty, despite the complicated circumstances (European and international sanctions), a war economy capable of generating and bringing to the front the necessary technical and military supplies based on the immediate needs of the troops directly engaged in conflict.[9]

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[6] A euphemism to name its current president, Vladimir Vladimirovici Putin.

[7] "In the theory of international relations, the decline of a hegemon is often associated with instability and closed or semi-closed economies and more frequent violations of international law." Silviu Nate, in "Compromisul indefinit din Marea Neagră și dilema conflictului perpetuu" (The indefinite Black Sea compromise and the dilemma of perpetual conflict), în Valentin Naumescu and Raluca Moldovan, (editors), *Războiul. Consecințele invaziei rusești din Ucraina la nivel global, european și românesc* (The War. The Consequences of the war in Ukraine for the world, Europe, and Romania), Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023, p. 51.

[8] Precise data concerning the loss of human lives is lacking; we estimate these losses at about 200.000 troops between 2014 and February 2024.

[9] According to international reports, Russia lost numerous units and heavy weapons on the Ukraine front, but has sufficient older, lesser quality stocks to replace the losses for several years to come.

The existence of several external allies, such as Iran, Belarus, North Korea and even China has enabled the Russian Federation to permanently upgrade its high-precision weapons, strategic armaments, missile, drone, bombs, and artillery ammunition stocks. By massively importing munitions and weapons from its external allies, by adopting radical measures for the functioning of the economy (specifically, of the military-industrial complex) during wartime and multiple successive budgetary allocations (which in 2024 will reach a new record level for defence expenses), the Russian Federation seems able to maintain the current frontline at least in the short and medium run; we do not have enough basic data (the frontline dynamics, the war technology needs, priority supply needs, the sustainability of resources, etc.) to assess the long-term Russian capability to maintain this front. The military and technical reserves also seem able to address the needs of the front in the short and medium run. For 2024, the leadership of Russian army plans to double the production of anti-air missiles, to substantially increase the production of military drones, tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery ammunition, etc. A growing interest is paid to the new military technologies, especially Sarmat rockets and modern drones.[10]

In the decade since the start of the war, the Russian army has managed to occupy approximately, 26% of the Ukrainian territory (up until February 2024). The Russian Federation has created the premises for reprising the tactical initiative on the frontlines, after initially resisting the 2023 Ukrainian counteroffensive. The front has remained largely immobile for about 1200 km in southern and eastern Ukraine, without the likelihood of some strategic surprises that would change the current positional war paradigm. In this context, we can anticipate that the current frontline will largely remain the same in 2024 as well.

The willingness of the Russian population to support the war is uncertain. The absence of credible sources and sociological research permanently create obstacles concerning a precise assessment of how much the Russian population supports the war. A moderate degree of support, of about 60%, motivated by the three factors[11] that have always counted in Moscow's grand hegemonic projects. Those people who are anti-war do not have the tradition of speaking against the despotic regime's bellicose vision in the public space. The contesting appetite of the Russian population is relatively small.

One can assume that, in its vast majority, the Moscow political class supports the war project. Political parties that have a tradition of moderate opposition against the Kremlin (The Russian Federation Communist Party and the Russian Liberal-Democrat party) support the country project proposed by President Putin in its current form, that of the conventional/classic/military war against Ukraine and the hybrid war against the collective West.

All the parliamentary factions in Moscow support this project. The contesting voices are individual and rare; expressing dissent leads to significant and direct personal risks.[12] Visible opposition against this Kremlin vision by dissenters who are well-placed in Moscow's

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[10] A field in which Russia has traditionally and chronically suffered.

[11] Ideology, propaganda, and the whip/authoritarianism/dictatorship.

[12] Lynching, assassination, arrest, confiscation of wealth, exclusion from public life, etc.

power architecture is no longer possible, in the context of such previous attempts failing (the so-called Prigozhin rebellion, non-conventionally stifled by Vladimir Vladimirovici).

The domestic economic resources seem able to support the Russian economy in its war effort. The fluctuation in oil prices on international markets, the rapid shift of hydrocarbon export routes from Europe to Asia and Africa (China, India, the Global South), as well as avoiding the sanctions regime with the (at least indirect) help of interested third parties have helped the Russian economy survive the sanctions regime, to find solutions to avoid them and reinvent itself in new markets. Exporting hydrocarbons continues to be the main means of supporting the war effort. The interest of several countries in the Global South to take advantage of the new geopolitical context to cover their import needs with the help of Russian hydrocarbons has considerably augmented the strategic transfer niche of Russian resources from Europe towards new markets (primarily in Asia). It is possible that the decision makers in Moscow have correctly anticipated (and rapidly implemented) the strategy of relocating hydrocarbons under war circumstances.

After a considerable limitation in its capacity of forging ties in the international system, marked by loneliness and global isolation of the Federation (see, in this respect, the UN General Assembly Resolutions in the first half of 2022), Russia seems to have reinvented itself in the Global South.

Currently, the perspective of isolating the Russian Federation in the international arena remains a fiction.[13] At least in the medium run, Russia's relations with the West in a broader sense are blocked, but all the other political action tools and instruments that Russia employs in the world (its permanent UN member status, the strategic bilateral actions with a series of influential global state actors, primarily China) have been fundamentally unaffected. Russia is (relatively[14]) isolated in the West and its relations with it have deteriorated in certain strategic directions, but it has a significant influence potential in the so-called Global South, which cannot be found in the Russia-West hegemonic dichotomy or in hegemonic antagonistic schemes such as China-West/the US.

The global, regional, and local context also seems to play a favourable role in Moscow's plans.[15] The political and administrative elites in Washington are now focused on domestic issues, against the background of presidential elections scheduled for the end of 2024. The likely return of a Republican administration at the White House following these elections will undoubtedly favour Moscow's bellicose and revisionist foreign policy and its current hegemonic project in particular. If Donald Trump or a like-minded ideological candidate from the same political family occupies the White House, there is a growing prospect for the war in Ukraine to finish following a transactional agreement negotiated by the leaders in Washington and Moscow.

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[13] Sergey Lavrov pontificated, before the State Duma, on February 14, 2024, that the West's "global minority" has not succeeded to isolate Russia internationally.

[14] See the case of Hungary.

[15] In a broader sense, of course, Moscow is violently contesting the current global order through the war against Ukraine. I have explained in detail in several analyses and studies the above-mentioned argument: "the paradigm of the old-world order to publicly buried under cannons and rockets". Popescu, *art. cit.*, in Naumescu (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 300-329.

The great European capitals cannot replace the US in the framework of the international support for Ukraine. The transfer of munitions and weapons to the Ukrainian army on the frontlines will considerably decline. Under these circumstances, with a disengaged America, a Europe that is insufficiently calibrated to the imperative of creating the premises for a strategic defeat of Russia and a Ukrainian army lacking the lacking the necessary Western supplies of weapons and munitions, the needs of the Russian Federation to support its militaristic venture in Ukraine will diminish, and its capacity to sustain the war effort will be proportionally augmented (a weaker dynamic of military confrontation on the frontline will lead to a correlated decrease in the primary needs to underwrite that effort).

To conclude, the Russian Federation has the hegemonic profile[16] and the strategic resources necessary for supporting the war effort in the short and medium run, within the current parameters of its hegemonic project.

Scenarios and Chances for the Evolution of Russia's Hegemonic Project

The Russian Federation seems less well prepared to face significant evolutions in its hegemonic project.

The mere preservation of the occupation of the territories conquered so far (26% of Ukrainian territory, according to its internationally recognised borders in 1991), as well as the protection of their current frontiers they share with the rest of Ukraine along the frontline will generate a considerable permanent burden for the Russian army and economy. The expectation that Moscow might have concerned a possible peace agreement with Ukraine that would include it giving up territories is illusory. Ukraine is condemned to wage a medium and long-term war to liberate these territories and seems willing to pursue it, even if this war should last long beyond the expectations and desired of the leaders in Kyiv and the Ukrainian people. Under these circumstances, Moscow needs to include huge budgetary allocations to maintain these territories under occupation, most likely in the medium and long run, as well as for the dislocation and stationing of military troops in the field to secure the future temporary frontiers with the rest of the Ukrainian territory.

Considering that, in the last months of maintaining its military regime in Chechnya, Moscow had to keep over 110,000 military personnel on the Chechen territory, we can estimate that it would need over 250,000 troops to preserve the occupation of the territories it already conquered (until February 2024) in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. These maintenance and occupation troops must be supplemented with troops that will be dislocated along the above-mentioned frontiers. Keeping the current occupied southern and eastern Ukrainian territories

[16] Silviu Nate provided an analysis of the Russian Federation's hegemonic profile based on R. O. Keohane's studies (for instance, R. O. Keohane, J. S. Nye, "Power and Interdependence Revisited", in *International Organisation*, Vol. 41, no. 4, Autumn 1987, pp. 725-753). See Silviu Nate, "Russia's Quest for Regional Hegemony: Appearances vs. Realities", in *Ukraine Analytica*, Issue 2 (24), 2021, pp. 12-19, https://ukraine-analytica.org/wp-content/uploads/NATE.pdf; according to him, "in the case of Russia (which Silviu Nate sees as a declining hegemon – emphasis mine), we can see aspirations towards a regional hegemonic status, without an economic and political weight. When its primacy can no longer be ensured through soft power or coercive diplomacy, Russia will resort to direct military force."(p. 14).

under occupation would be equivalent to a military occupying force of about 500,000 people in these territories and along their frontiers, at least in the first years of occupation.

Any expansion of these territorial occupation aims will bring along a correlated growth in the costs of imposing and maintaining the occupation regime.

Based on the preliminary analytical data at our disposal, the main territorial occupation aim of Russia in Ukraine concerns the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (in their entirety), expanding the current territorial corridor along the entire Ukrainian littoral of the Black Sea (the Kherson, Nikolaev and Odessa regions), joining up with the districts in Transnistria, eventually occupying them,[17] a correlated expansion of the respective territorial corridor to the other end of its length (in eastern Ukraine towards Kharkov) and, as much as possible, expanding the width of this territorial corridor in the regions of Zaporozhe and Kherson (by conquering them in their entirety).[18] Even in the unlikely short-term case that these aims will be fulfilled, the costs required to do so will be enormous.

Moreover, certain broader objectives, concerning territorial occupation and political vassals in a wider post-soviet territory, under the guise of a USSR 2.0 hegemonic project[19] would also imply related costs that clearly surpass Russia's resources and reserves. We can estimate that the current efforts of the international community to block the chances of the success of this project in the medium and long term will continue to be substantial. If Russia can create credible premises to enact this USSR 2.0 hegemonic project in the wider Black Sea region, as I have explained earlier, I believe that, for reasons of regional security, the other countries in the region and their strategic allies must take on the imperative task of responding with a counterpart strategic project such as Prometheus 2.0, modelled after the famous interwar

[17] The occupation of the entire territory of Moldova if need be.

[18] "Moscow's current imperialist and revisionist project is aimed, from a territorial perspective, at occupying large swaths of Ukrainian territory, in the east and the south, based on plans that include the control over the large southern (Odessa) and eastern cities (Kharkov), the de facto occupation of these cities and their eponymous regions, as well as military advancement along the current southern corridor towards Odessa and beyond, to the future border with Romania." Dorin Popescu, "2024: nimeni nu va trece Rubiconul, dar toți adună oști acolo" (Nobody will cross the Rubicon, but everyone is gathering troops there), Contributors, December 30, 2023, https://www.contributors.ro/2024-nimeni-nu-va-trece-rubiconul-dar-toti-aduna-osti-acolo/.

[19] "Moscow aims at revitalising an imperialist geopolitical project, the USSR 2.0 project, whose priority role is to create additional instruments of control and influence on a global scale, to flex its geopolitical muscles. Ukraine is only the theatre of conventional operations in this hybrid war, a first theatre of operations in a series of victims written on a short list in the boudoir nightstand." Popescu, "URSS 2.0 – ieșirea din scenă și din istorie".

Prometheus project,[20] in which Washington needs to play the leading role without manifesting any domestic fatigue.[21]

Finally, on a global scale, unlike the regional case, where the Russian Federation's hegemonic project is still being developed, we have all the necessary analytical data[22] to assess that Russia's paradigmatic objective of hegemonically reinventing itself on a global scale will not succeed; "the global strategic balance will change when Russia loses its great power status and will be relegated to the position of a medium, regional, Eurasiatic power while China will be on the rise. The competition for global supremacy will essentially be one between China and the US."[23]

At the start of 2024, Ukraine's military and political leadership has already announced the strategic aims of the new phase in its war against Russia: the systematic destruction and exhaustion of Russia's capacity to wage this war.[24] These objectives are strictly correlated with the priority of liberating all the territories occupied by the Russia army. From the analytical perspective described above (increasing the Russian costs of imposing and maintaining the war effort and the occupation regime in the conquered Ukrainian territories), it is evident that Kyiv's priorities are correct and appropriate for the new tactical situation.

In the short term, time works in Russia's favour. The temporisation of direct military confrontations on the battlefield leads to favourable circumstances for imposing an occupation regime in the temporarily conquered territories.

In the medium and short run, the resources of the Russian Federation are limited. The need to permanently allocate resources for the occupation of the current Ukrainian territories can lead to temporary collapse. Occupying new territories in Ukraine will generate permanent additional costs, at least in the medium run (in addition to the loss of human life and the

[20] According to Charles King, "the Prometheus project – or Prométhée, as it was known, from the magazine around which it formed – seemed, in the 1920s and 1930s, a well-thought-out plan to build an alliance of the Black Sea states. The Prometheus group aimed not only to liberate the captive peoples in the Soviet Union, as well as to foster cooperation against the Bolsheviks' regional hegemony. The Prometheus project remains unique through the diversity of the countries and individuals who conceived it and the vision about the importance of the Black Sea in the south-eastern European system of international relations. The solution preferred by the group members was to dismantle the Soviet state and to re-establish the small republics created after the fall of the Tsarist Empire. The strategic value of this alliance was beyond dispute. For the group representatives, the Black Sea was the cornerstone of the entire Oriental question. The Prometheus project eventually failed, at least in the first half of the 20th century. The idea of a Black Sea community appeared as a quixotic fixation of some fervent anti-communists, but the end of the Cold War would bring it back to life." Charles King, *Marea Neagră: o istorie* (The Black Sea: a history), trans. Dorian Branea and Cristina Chevereșan. Iași: Editura Polirom, Historia Collection, 2015, pp. 244-246.

[21] "The US and NATO must lead the regional response to this crisis focused on the Black Sea, because the root of this volatility is in the Black Sea. First of fall, the US must force Turkey to change its position towards Russia, leading it away from neutrality. Second, the US and NATO must revise their policy in the Caucasus and the attempt to involve Armenia in a new strategic system. Third, the US should use the bases of its allies and increase its presence in the eastern Mediterranean. Fourth, the US and NATO should consider an operative air force in the western Black Sea region. Fifth, Romania should increase its industrial-military cooperation with Ukraine." Scutaru et al., *art. cit.*, pp. 21-24.

[22] These go beyond the scope of the present study.

[23] Valentin Naumescu, "Intrarea în lumea postliberală" (Entering the postliberal world), in Valentin Naumescu, Raluca Moldovan and Thomas Tolnai, (editors), *Criza. Vocile ICDE în timpul pandemiei* (The Crisis. ICDE voices during the pandemic), Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest, 2020, pp. 28-29.

[24] "Inflicting systematic losses on Russia is a Ukrainian priority in 2024", Volodymyr Zelensky, February 2024.

destruction of military equipment), needed for maintaining the occupation regime, guarding, and protecting the frontiers, rebuilding infrastructure, providing a minimal level of social welfare, etc.

It is doubtful whether the Russian Federation has the necessary resources to impose and maintain its occupation regime in the current territories it has temporarily occupied (in February 2024) in eastern and southern Ukraine. What is clear is that any new additional territories occupied will incur additional costs in the short and medium run.

We estimate that the Russian Federation does not have the resources to completely carry out the territorial aims outlines above (the integral occupation of the Kharkov, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporozhe, Kherson, Nikolaev, Odessa regions), as well as for imposing and maintaining the occupation regime in these territories in the medium and long run.

Merely occupying these regions, in the current positional war paradigm, is tantamount to a mission impossible. In order to fulfil this aim, Moscow needs an operational break which it can use with a double purpose: i) renewing resources for a new active military phase to occupy new territories along the lines and directions described above and ii) imposing an occupation regime in the territories it has conquered and controlled up to now. Kyiv is aware that an operational break would be extremely useful to Moscow and is not willing to make any concessions to provide one.

Unlike the war plans of its operational commanders who were undoubtedly counting (at the start of the large scale invasion in February 2022) on the solidarity of a considerable proportion of the eastern and southern Ukrainian population with the Russian occupation army, at the moment, the Kremlin leadership is aware that these territories cannot be conquered unless they are destroyed; the myth of the supposed solidarity of the local populations with the Russian "liberators" (which could have greatly simplified the occupation of new territories and would have substantially reduced the occupation costs) cannot have survived even within the Kremlin walls, where geopolitical dictionaries are being reinvented.

It is clear that the Russian planners are reconsidering the strategic calculations concerning the correlation between aims and resources. For European analytical milieus, it is quite likely that probably re-evaluations of the Ukraine war strategy will emerge from these reassessments of the cost/benefit relation. In the functioning patterns of the Russian world, the re-evaluation of the war strategy does not necessarily derive from upgrades in the cost-benefit analysis; these upgrades are a mere small, elective corollary of the Kremlin leader's political decisions.

The inscrutability of Vladimir Vladimirovici's political decisions to support this war comes from the consistency of his promotion of the narrative of "Russia's existential war to counter the expansion of the hostile West's infrastructure". These narratives are constantly propagated all over the world from the towers of the Kremlin's church. They lead to successive decisions concerning significant increases of the military budget,[25] the inflation of the military

[25] In November 2023, President Vladimir Putin signed the 2024-2026 Russian budget that includes a 66% increase in the money allocated for defence compared to 2023. In 2024, the Defence sector is slated to receive 111 billion dollars, about a third of the entire budget (the 2024 military budget of all NATO countries is about 380 billion dollars). In 2023, the Defence budget was approximately 66.7 billion dollars.

apparatus, the consolidation of military production, the permanent transition to a Russian war economy, the diplomatic defiance of the West, etc.

It is highly unlikely for the war against Ukraine to end in the current paradigm.

Moscow will force new escalations and crossings of red lines. The partial accomplishment of the current war's objectives will not bring any guarantees for Moscow in the medium and long run.

The perspective of developing the West's military infrastructure on the Ukrainian territory[26] remains just as likely as before the start of the war and will continue to be perceived as dangerous and an existential threat against Russia by the Kremlin.[27] The Russian invasion brought Finland and Sweden into NATO, and the consolidation of the Alliance's military presence in these states (close to the new NATO-Russia frontiers) is natural and legitimate. Ukraine's pro-European and pro-Atlantic option has not been stifled by the Russian invasion; quite the contrary, the popular support for Ukraine's euro-Atlantic direction has grown and has become irreversible.

The supposed existential threat that the Russian leaders[28] would mention hypocritically, mimetically or with a vested interest in supporting the war against Ukraine narrative has increased.

Ukraine has not become a vassal state, or a western Russian province, and its territory can engender military offensives that are much more dangerous than those within Ukraine's capabilities prior to the 2022 large-scale invasion. Now, Ukraine is a country with strong military equipment, with a motivated army, with a hostile population in the medium and long run, with a strong national project. Russia's war against Ukraine has accelerated the process of ethnic and state consolidation, with a strong anti-Russian dimension as far as its future options are concerned.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the temporary border put up by the Russian army tanks in southern and eastern Ukraine, several large Ukrainian cities (Odessa, Kharkov) could witness and prepare, at any moment, considerable military offensives against the Russian army dislocated along the front line; from a military standpoint, considering the current war conditions, Russia cannot think that a long-term occupation in which the future borders are adjacent to cities with such great military and economic potential as Odessa and Kharkov. Both could become, at any moment, pillars of resistance for the liberation war that Ukraine will wage in the coming period.

Moreover, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has revitalised the European and Euro-Atlantic project of Ukraine, as well as, at the same time, the European projects of Moldova and Georgia; the possible concessions given to Turkey for an ambiguous geopolitical game in this

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[26] Even under the circumstances in which the occupation of certain territories in southern and eastern Ukraine will be prolonged sine die.

[27] The Russian leaders have repeatedly insisted on the idea of the hybrid war waged by the collective West against the Russian Federation, a war that, according to the Russian narrative, would make the need to protect Russia from existential threats even more acute. Russia is defending its very existence in Ukraine – is the justification Kremlin has reiterated throughout the two years since the large-scale war in Ukraine started.

[28] The constant and irreversible closeness of NATO's military infrastructure to Russia's frontiers.

war regarding the Southern Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh) have led to considerable symbolic anti-Russian protests in Erevan.

Under these circumstances, the territorial occupations accomplished so far are not enough for the Russian Federation's hegemonic projection in the Black Sea region. From the perspective of the important objectives which have not been accomplished in Russia's new hegemonic projection, Moscow is forced to escalate again, to mount new offensives, to create new strategic divisions and advance again.

The costs of these operations will not be correlated with their benefits, because the functioning logic of the Kremlin power pyramid excludes small artifices and rational schemes that transcend the leader's authoritarian hegemonic exercise.

Therefore, in terms of medium-run consequences, one can expect Russia to prepare new strategic surprises in this war and test new limits for its risk appetite, within parameters that can be lethal for its paradigmatic hegemonic projection.

Conclusion

In all probability, on a global scale, the Russian Federation will fail in the objective of recalibrating its hegemonic power (if it has not done so already). Most likely, Russia will be absent from the stellar configuration of the new world order.[29]

From a strategic perspective, there are many arguments that support the idea that Russia will lose the war, including on a regional level.[30] Even Moscow's chances of invoking a grey geopolitical arrangement, a regional hegemonic cohabitation, are uncertain.[31]

Even if the Russian Federation does have the necessary resources to impose and maintain its occupation regime in the current temporarily occupied territories (in February 2024) in the east and the south, in the short run, each new territorial gain will incur new costs and additional needs in the short and medium run. We assess that the Russian Federation does not have the necessary resources to completely accomplish wider territorial objectives (the complete occupation of the Kharkov, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporozhe, Kherson, Nikolaev, Odessa regions), as well as for imposing and maintaining the occupation regime in these territories in the medium and long run.

At the same time, Moscow's risk appetite will gradually increase, forcing new limits and frontiers of its hegemonic project. At a certain moment, one of these escalations will prove lethal to Russia. Russia's western limes will break again.

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[29] Dorin Popescu, "The Hybrid Design of the New World Order: A Black Sea View", in Valentin Naumescu, Raluca Moldovan, and Diana Petruț (eds.), *The EU and NATO Approaches to the Black Sea Region. Proceedings of the second edition of the international conference The European Union's External Relations and the Perspectives of the Global Order (EUXGLOB),* vol. 2, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022, p. 280.

[30] "Beyond the struggle to conquer territories, whose final result is so far unknown, there is a good chance that the long-term factual analyses (2023 and beyond) will show that Russia will have lost the war in Ukraine, strategically speaking." Naumescu, *art. cit.*, in Naumescu, Moldovan, and Tolnai (eds.), *op. cit.,* p. 25.

[31] The scenario of a great power compromise in the Black Sea (according to Silviu Nate), in which "the US and China enter the fray to obtain the position of primary war and peace broker in the Black Sea", one based on Russia's regional geopolitical decline, corroborated with a possible American repositioning concerning Ukraine and Russia. Nate, *art. cit.*, in Naumescu, Moldovan (eds.), *op. cit.,* pp. 55-60.

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Foreign Policy Studies, and New Strategy Centre, 2023. https://newstrategycentre.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Security-threats-and-challenges-in-the-black-sea-web.pdf.

The War in Ukraine Impacting EU Trade. Ukraine-EU Trade Relations 2013-2022

Maryana Prokop

Abstract. The war in Ukraine, sparked by the Russian military invasion in February 2022, has significantly influenced European trade dynamics, particularly concerning Ukraine's trade relations with the European Union (EU). This study examines Ukraine's trade relationship with the EU from 2013 to 2022, assessing its significance as a trading partner before and after the Russian military aggression. Through an analysis of Ukrainian exports and imports during this period, the study highlights the shifting trade patterns and strategic orientations in response to geopolitical upheavals. The analysis reveals a notable decrease in trade value between Ukraine and Russia following the military aggression, prompting Ukraine to actively seek alternative markets, notably the EU. Conversely, there is an upward trend in Ukrainian exports and imports with the EU, indicating a growing reliance on the European market. The study substantiates the hypothesis of the EU's significant role in Ukrainian trade, with the EU's share of Ukrainian exports steadily increasing from 25.61% in 2013 to 63.07% in 2022. Similarly, the EU's share of Ukrainian imports increased from 33.66% in 2013 to nearly fifty percent (48.87%) in 2022. This strategic pivot towards the EU aligns with Ukraine's broader foreign policy goals for Euro-Atlantic integration and underscores the resilience of Ukraine's trade policies amidst geopolitical turmoil. Overall, by actively seeking new markets and partnerships, particularly with the EU, Ukraine aims to mitigate the adverse effects of the conflict with Russia and position itself for long-term economic growth and stability in the European context.

Keywords: war in Ukraine, trade, EU, exports, imports

Introduction

The war in Ukraine, initiated by the Russian military invasion in February 2022, has reverberated far beyond its borders, profoundly impacting European trade dynamics. As Ukraine and Russia held significant roles in the global market for goods and services, the eruption of conflict disrupted established trade networks and introduced new challenges to European economies. The consequences of this conflict on European trade have been multifaceted, ranging from immediate disruptions in supply chains to long-term shifts in trade policies and partnerships.

The invasion not only inflicted substantial damage on Ukraine's critical infrastructure, industrial facilities, and raw material stocks but also triggered mass migrations that further strained trade relations between Ukraine and its European partners. European countries, in response to Russian aggression, swiftly implemented a series of sanctions and restrictions aimed at isolating Russia economically. These measures, while intended to deter further hostilities, have had significant ramifications for European trade, altering trade routes, supply chains, and market dynamics.

The objective of this chapter is to examine the trade relationship between Ukraine and European Union countries, aiming to assess Ukraine's significance as a trading partner for the European market both prior to and following the Russian military aggression in 2022. To

demonstrate the significance of Ukraine for the economies of the European Union and the world, the author conducted further analysis by compiling data on Ukrainian exports and imports from 2013 to 2022. The year 2013 marked a significant turning point in the analysis, chosen because up to that point, Russia had been Ukraine's primary trade partner, accounting for 24% of exports and 30% of imports during that period. However, the annexation of Crimea and Russian support for separatist movements in the Lugansk and Donetsk regions led to a reassessment of Ukraine's economic policy and its key trading partners. As for the endpoint of the analysis (2023), it was determined by the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the European Union's actions towards Ukraine, which included the implementation of various measures to facilitate trade amidst wartime conditions. Specifically focusing on goods, the study did not consider data related to exports and imports of services. Additionally, the study established a commodity structure for both exported and imported goods, allowing for the identification of the most crucial elements in Ukraine's trade relationships with the EU.

This chapter seeks to delve into the various aspects of this influence, examining the immediate disruptions caused by the conflict as well as the long-term implications for European trade policies and partnerships. By understanding how the war in Ukraine has reshaped European trade dynamics, policymakers and stakeholders can better navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by this geopolitical turmoil. The author attempted to answer the research question: [Q] What role does the European Union play in Ukrainian trade from 2013 to 2022? The hypothesis [H] was taken to be: The European Union holds a significant position in Ukrainian trade, and there is a growth in the EU's portion of Ukrainian exports from 2013 to 2022.

The redefinition of Ukrainian foreign policy

Over the past decade (from 2014), Ukraine's trade landscape has been profoundly shaped by the ongoing conflict with Russia, commonly known as the Ukrainian-Russian hybrid war. This conflict reached a critical point with the Russian military aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The origins of this conflict can be traced back to late 2013, when then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union sparked mass protests in Kiev's Independence Square, known as the "Revolution of Dignity" or "Euromaidan." Simultaneously, anti-European and pro-Russian protests known as "Anti-Maidan" emerged in eastern and southern Ukraine.[1]

The next significant development in Russia's efforts to thwart Ukrainian Euro-integration was the annexation of Crimea in February-March 2014. Following the annexation, demonstrations erupted in eastern Ukraine, with separatists demanding annexation to Russia. This led to the creation of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, supported by Russia. The conflict in eastern Ukraine continued, characterized by both covert and overt Russian

[1] Maryana Prokop, "Russia-Ukraine: Difficult Neighbourly Relations," in Agnieszka Kasińska-Matryka and Karolina Pałka-Suchojad (eds.), *The Russia-Ukraine War of 2022*, London-New York: Routledge, 2023, pp. 16-17; Magdalena Tomala, Maryana Prokop, "Zagrożenia militarne i wojenne a bezpieczeństwo gospodarcze państwa. Case study: Konflikt zbrojny między Ukrainą a Rosją w 2014 roku," (Military and war threats and the economic security of the state. Case study: Armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia in 2014), *Annales Universitatis Pedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Securitate*, vol. 11, no. 2/2021, pp. 40–59.

involvement, until the direct Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022. The Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022 escalated the conflict into a conventional war, accompanied by an increase in cyber-attacks targeting Ukrainian government offices, infrastructure, and media outlets. These attacks, which began even before the military aggression, have further destabilized Ukraine's economy and security.[2]

The research aligns with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the European Union's initiatives to streamline trade during times of war. Through an analysis of Ukraine's trade strategy within the framework of its multi-vector foreign policy, this chapter seeks to offer perspectives on the changing landscape of European trade amidst geopolitical upheaval. Examining Ukraine's foreign and security policy within the context of the international environment, Yeropolk Tymkiv delineates three distinct concepts that have been implemented at various stages of the state's operation: neutrality (non-aligned status), the multi-vector policy concept, and the directional concept. The latter can be pursued in two dimensions: Euro-Atlantic, involving integration with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, and Eurasian, involving cooperation with Russia.[3]

The Ukraine's foreign policy trajectory, we observe a shifting landscape influenced by historical events and geopolitical dynamics. Initially, Ukraine pursued a policy of neutrality and non-nuclear status, exemplified by the "Dmytro Pavlyuchko doctrine" in the post-independence era. However, this stance evolved with the adoption of the National Security Concept in 1997, marking a departure from neutrality towards participation in global and regional security systems.[4]

Ukraine's war doctrine, established in 1993, marked the country's decision to renounce its possession of the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal and adopt a non-nuclear status. Following the dissolution of the USSR, Ukraine inherited approximately 1,800 strategic nuclear warheads and 176 intercontinental ballistic missiles, making it the third-largest nuclear arsenal globally after the US and Russia. By committing to disarmament and embracing a permanent non-nuclear state status, Ukraine received security assurances from the US, Russia, and the UK through the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Signed on January 14, 1994, by the presidents of the USA, Russia, and Ukraine, this memorandum aimed at the elimination of all nuclear weapons deployed on Ukrainian territory. It also guaranteed respect for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, existing borders, and pledged non-use or threat of force against its territorial integrity or political independence. Additionally, the memorandum ensured

[2] Головко, В., et al., "Революція Гідності 2013–2014 рр. та агресія Росії проти України," in П. Полянські (ed.), Науково-методичні матеріали, Київ (V. Golovko et al., "The Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014 and Russia's aggression against Ukraine," in. P. Polyanski (ed.), *Scientific and methodological materials*, Kyiv, 2015, pp. 5-18; Serhii Plokhy, *The Russo-Ukrainian War. The Return of History*, New York: Penguin Random House, 2023, pp. 136-145.

[3] Yaropolk Tymkiv, "Koncepcje polityki zagranicznej i bezpieczeństwa Ukrainy," in M. Pietraś, T. Kapuśniak (eds.), *Ukraina w stosunkach międzynarodowych* (Concepts of foreign and security policy of Ukraine. In: M. Pietraś, T. Kapuśniak (eds.), Ukraine in international relations), Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2007, pp. 182-185; Prokop, "Russia-Ukraine: Difficult Neighbourly Relations," pp. 6-20.

[4] Maryana Prokop, „Od koncepcji do Strategii Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Ukrainy. Ewolucja polityki bezpieczeństwa narodowego Ukrainy w latach 1991–2012" (From the concept to the National Security Strategy of Ukraine. Evolution of Ukraine's national security policy in 1991–2012), *Nowa Polityka Wschodnia*, Vol. 2, no. 7/2014, pp. 27-41.

assistance in the event of Ukraine facing attack, aggression, or threats involving nuclear weapons.[5]

The subsequent implementation of a multi-vector policy, underpinned by balancing between Eastern and Western interests, reflected Ukraine's strategic ambiguity in foreign affairs. This approach was particularly pronounced during President Leonid Kuchma's first term, characterized by cooperation with both Russia and Western institutions. However, the "Orange Revolution" and subsequent political developments saw fluctuations in Ukraine's foreign policy orientation, with varying degrees of emphasis on pro-Russian and pro-European alignments. Considering the economic aspect, Ukraine's reliance on Russian oil and natural gas compelled it to maintain a strategic partnership with Russia. The "gas crises" of 2006 and 2009 were direct results of tensions between the two nations. The adoption of a pro-European stance became feasible following the "Revolution of Dignity" but it also prompted Russia to alter its tactics to coerce Ukraine into closer cooperation. Ukraine's pivot towards Euro-Atlantic cooperation is perceived by Russia as a threat to its stability and regional influence. In addition to economic pressures, Russia has employed military tactics, starting with the annexation of Crimea, followed by support for separatist groups in eastern Ukraine leading to the establishment of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Lugansk People's Republic (LNR).[6]

Under President Viktor Yanukovych's tenure, Ukraine leaned towards closer ties with Russia, culminating in the rejection of an association agreement with the EU in 2013. This decision sparked widespread protests, leading to Yanukovych's ousting and a shift towards integration with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Yet, this pro-Western pivot incited Russian backlash, resulting in the annexation of Crimea and the escalation of conflict in eastern Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea not only underscored Russia's strategic interests in the Black Sea region but also reflected a broader geopolitical vision influenced by Aleksandr Dugin's "Russky Mir" concept. This concept advocates for Russia's isolation from the West and the consolidation of post-Soviet states to assert dominance in Eurasia. Overall, Ukraine's foreign policy evolution underscores the complex interplay between domestic politics,

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[5] Меморандум, Про гарантії безпеки у зв'язку з приєднанням України до Договору про нерозповсюдження ядерної зброї, 1994, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_158#Text (Memorandum. (1994). On security guarantees in connection with the accession of Ukraine to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_158#Text), p. 40. О. Махно, „Відмова України від ядерного статусу та ствердження позитивного міжнародного іміджу держави" *Сторінки історії* (O. Makhno, "Ukraine's renunciation of nuclear status and affirmation of a positive international image of the state," *Pages of history*), vol. 36/2013, pp. 198-205.

[6] Józef Tymanowski, *Sąsiedzkie państwa wschodnie w polskiej polityce bezpieczeństwa* (Neighbouring eastern countries in Polish security policy), Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2009, pp. 301-302; Постанова Верховної Ради України Про Концепцію (основи державної політики) національної безпеки України, (Відомості Верховної Ради України (ВВР) (Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine On the Concept (fundamentals of state policy) of national security of Ukraine, (Information of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine), 1997, N 10, ст. 85, http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3/97-%D0%B2%D1%80. Постанова (Decree) 1997; 16; Maryana Prokop, "Kształtowanie się zasad polsko-ukraińskiego partnerstwa strategicznego w dobie transformacji" (Shaping the principles of the Polish-Ukrainian strategic partnership in the era of transformation), M. Grabowski (ed.), *Stosunki międzynarodowe we współczesnym świecie: regiony i problem* (International relations in the modern world: regions and problems), Krakow: Goblin Studio, 2011, p. 269; Tadeusz A. Olszański, *Trud niepodległości. Ukraina na przełomie tysiącleci* (The hardships of independence. Ukraine at the turn of the millennium), Krakow: Instytut Studiow Strategicznych, 2003, pp. 125-127.

geopolitical pressures, and regional dynamics. The country's trajectory reflects a constant negotiation of competing interests and strategic alignments, shaped by historical legacies and contemporary geopolitical imperatives.[7]

Ukrainian researchers suggest that Ukraine's foreign policy evolution, from neutrality to multi-vectorality and directional concepts, is influenced by both internal political dynamics and the geopolitical landscape. Additionally, societal divisions play a significant role, with Western Ukraine generally supporting integration into the EU and NATO, while Eastern Ukraine leans towards closer ties with Russia. This societal ambivalence is attributed to a lack of self-determination and consistency in societal perspectives on statehood, politics, and economics. This ambivalence, characterized by the simultaneous adherence to conflicting values, is seen as typical of transitional periods where different political cultures and social behaviours intersect. Presidents P. Poroshenko and Vladimir Zelensky 2014-2022 have both advocated for Ukraine's foreign policy orientation towards Euro-Atlantic structures, namely the EU and NATO. Ukraine's shift towards pro-European aspirations, coupled with a distancing from cooperation with Russia, is seen as a factor contributing to Russia's dissatisfaction with Ukrainian policy.

EU-Ukraine Trade Relations 2013-2022

The annexation of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbass region led to a significant downturn in Ukraine's GDP, with a decline of 6.6% in 2014 and 9.8% in 2015. While the process of GDP stabilization showed improvement until 2019, the Ukrainian economy experienced a slowdown in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. In 2019, the GDP level was recorded at USD 153.0 billion, slightly increasing to USD 155.3 billion in 2020, and notably reaching USD 198.3 billion in 2021.[8] Halyna Petryshyn, in her analysis of Ukraine's economic situation before the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, highlights the country's better preparation for the 2020 crisis compared to the previous one in 2014-2015. This readiness was attributed to the stability of the national currency and the high foreign exchange reserves of the National Bank of Ukraine. However, the severity of the crisis was influenced by the global economic state, particularly affecting Ukrainian industries and agriculture reliant on manufacturing exports. Efforts to revive the economy post-Covid restrictions resulted in a 4% decline in 2020, with subsequent recovery and GDP growth in 2021.[9] Figure 1 provides a year-by-year overview of Ukraine's total imports and exports from 2013 to 2022. This summary is

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[7] Prokop, "Russia-Ukraine: Difficult Neighbourly Relations," pp. 6-10, Tymkiv, "Koncepcje polityki zagranicznej i bezpieczeństwa Ukrainy," pp. 188-189; Tomala, Prokop, "Zagrożenia militarne i wojenne," pp. 45-50.

[8] Державна служба статистики України. Державні фінанси, податки та публічний сектор (State Statistics Service of Ukraine. Public finances, taxes and the public sector), retrieved from: https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/.

[9] Halyna Petryshyn, „Sytuacja gospodarcza w Ukrainie przed wybuchem wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej" (The economic situation in Ukraine before the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war), *Społeczestwo i Polityka*, vol. 3, no. 72/2022, pp. 61–80; Report NISS, 2014. Щодо тенденцій розвитку економіки України у 2014-2015 Аналітична записка (Regarding trends in the development of the economy of Ukraine in 2014-2015. Analytical note), retreived from https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/ekonomika/schodo-tendenciy-rozvitku-ekonomiki-ukraini-u-2014-2015-rr-analitichna; Руденко, М. Фінансова криза в Україні 2014-2015 років: причини та інструменти регулювання. Науковий вісник НЛТУ України. Серія еконімічна, 25.7, 2015. 2014-2020 (Rudenko, M. Financial crisis in Ukraine 2014-2015: causes and regulatory tools. Scientific bulletin of NLTU of Ukraine. Economic series, July 25, 2015. 2014-2020).

significant in light of the GDP decline and ensuing economic crisis in Ukraine, which directly impacted the country's import and export indicators.[10]

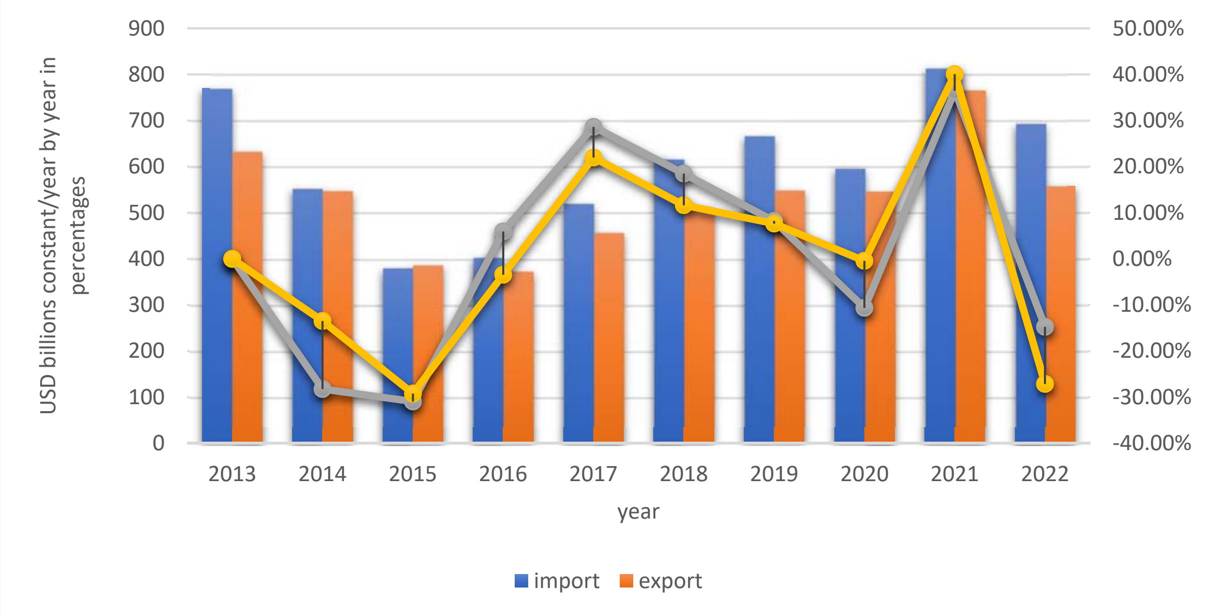


Figure 1 Global imports and exports of goods from Ukraine from 2013 to 2022 in USD billion
Source: own compilation based on World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution. Exports and imports of Ukraine 2013-2022, and World Bank, (CPI for years); Державна служба статистики України. Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність (State Statistics Service of Ukraine. Foreign economic activity)

Table 1: Overview of Ukraine's Exports and Imports from 2013 to 2022

	2013	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
import	769.860125	552.635968	381.6997517	404.3745516	520.2033391	616.425555	667.2427065	596.3160006	813.789672	693.758464
export	633.2046879	547.8789641	387.9150788	374.6144248	456.9575206	510.2253769	549.3191722	546.945407	766.1862791	558.3226309
import y-by-y	0.00 %	-28.22 %	-30.93 %	5.94 %	28.64 %	18.50 %	8.24 %	-10.63 %	36.47 %	-14.75 %

[10] World Bank, "Ukraine's exports and imports 2013-2022" retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL?end=2022&locations=US&start=2010; Державна служба статистики України. Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність (State Statistics Service of Ukraine. Foreign economic activity), retrieved from: https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/.

export y-by-y	0.00 %	-13.48 %	-29.20 %	-3.43 %	21.98 %	11.66 %	7.66 %	-0.43 %	40.08 %	-27.13 %

Source: own compilation based on World Bank data; Ukraine's exports and imports 2013-2022; Державна служба статистики України. Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність

The data depicted in Table 1 outlines the repercussions of the 2014-2015 crisis on Ukraine's imports of goods, indicating a decline of 28.22% in 2014 and a further drop of 30.93% in 2015, followed by subsequent recoveries in the ensuing years. However, there was a significant 10.63% decrease in imports in 2020 due to the pandemic, while in 2021, imports surged by 36.74%, albeit experiencing a subsequent decline of 14.75% due to the war. Regarding exports of Ukrainian goods, there was a notable decrease between 2014 (-13.48%) and 2015 (-29.20%), followed by a minor decrease in 2016 (-3.435), and a substantial increase of 21.98% in 2017. The pandemic in 2020 led to a slight 0.43% decline in exports, followed by a significant increase of 40.08% in 2021, only to decrease by 27.13% as a result of the first year of hostilities (World Bank. Ukraine's exports and imports 2013-2022). Figure 3.2 illustrates the trade dynamics between Ukraine and the EU, as well as between Ukraine and Russia from 2013 to 2022, providing insights into how Ukrainian trade policy evolved following the events of 2013 and the military aggression in 2022.[11]

In 2014, exports to the EU totalled $166.837107 billion, declining to $128.68092 billion the following year. However, there was an upward trend from 2016 onwards, reaching $299.049836 billion in 2021. Following the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022, exports to the EU surged to $352.114454 billion, primarily facilitated by several EU instruments aimed at streamlining the sale of Ukrainian goods. A similar pattern was observed for Ukrainian imports from the EU, with imports totalling $259.144075 billion in 2014, dropping to $150.173744 billion just two years later. It wasn't until 2018 that imports caught up with the 2013 levels. In contrast, imports from the EU were valued at $326.74713 billion the year before the war, rising to $339.019043 billion in the year of the war's outbreak (World Bank. Exports and imports of Ukraine 2013-2022). Detailed data on Ukrainian imports and exports to the EU, Russia, and other countries worldwide can be found in Table 2.[12]

[11] World Bank, "Ukraine's exports and imports 2013-2022", retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL?end=2022&locations=US&start=2010; Державна служба статистики України. Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність, retrieved from: https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/; Foreign Affairs Council, June 23, 2014, retrieved from https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2014/06/23/.

[12] World Bank, "Ukraine's exports and imports 2013-2022", retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL?end=2022&locations=US&start=2010; Державна служба статистики України. Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність, retrieved from: https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/; Міністерство економіки України (Ministry of Economy of Ukraine), retrieved from https://www.me.gov.ua/Tags/DocumentsByTag?lang=uk-UA&id=565ab860-7fe2-4f51-8e27-0b70ff06c732&tag=ZovnishnoekonomichnaDiialnist.

Table 2 Overview of Export and Import Figures for Ukraine, EU, Russia, and Global Trade in USD Billions and Percentages

	2013	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
import EU	259.144075	206.983792	150.173744	169.286539	204.873093	240.635357	266.03579	250.468423	326.74713	339.019043
export EU	162.143899	166.837107	128.68092	135.81857	179.586779	211.00928	220.884755	199.471441	299.049836	352.114454
import RUS	232.439943	128.843597	76.2329904	53.0514944	75.7228875	87.2071588	76.6566308	50.5850171	68.0467892	19.3660921
export RUS	150.772591	99.5810759	49.1185412	37.015981	41.4909004	39.369902	35.5880963	30.0889361	38.9561058	6.19038082
import REST	278.276107	216.808579	155.293017	182.036518	239.607358	288.583039	324.550286	295.26256	418.995752	335.373329
export REST	320.288197	281.460782	210.115618	201.779873	235.879841	259.846195	292.846321	317.38503	428.180337	200.017796
EU i %	**33.66%**	**37.45%**	**39.34%**	**41.86%**	**39.38%**	**39.04%**	**39.87%**	**42.00%**	**40.15%**	**48.87%**
EU e %	**25.61%**	**30.45%**	**33.17%**	**36.26%**	**39.30%**	**41.36%**	**40.21%**	**36.47%**	**39.03%**	**63.07%**
Rus i %	**30.19%**	**16.74%**	**9.90%**	**6.89%**	**9.84%**	**11.33%**	**9.96%**	**6.57%**	**8.84%**	**2.52%**
Rus e %	**23.81%**	**15.73%**	**7.76%**	**5.85%**	**6.55%**	**6.22%**	**5.62%**	**4.75%**	**6.15%**	**0.98%**
rest i %	**36.15%**	**28.16%**	**20.17%**	**23.65%**	**31.12%**	**37.49%**	**42.16%**	**38.35%**	**54.42%**	**43.56%**
rest e %	**50.58%**	**44.45%**	**33.18%**	**31.87%**	**37.25%**	**41.04%**	**46.25%**	**50.12%**	**67.62%**	**31.59%**
import	769.860125	552.635968	381.699752	404.374552	520.203339	616.425555	667.242706	596.316001	813.789672	693.758464
export	633.204688	547.878964	387.915079	374.614425	456.957521	510.225377	549.319172	546.945407	766.186279	558.322631
import	0.00%	-28.22%	-30.93%	5.94%	28.64%	18.50%	8.24%	-10.63%	36.47%	-14.75%
export	0.00%	-13.48%	-29.20%	-3.43%	21.98%	11.66%	7.66%	-0.43%	40.08%	-27.13%

Source: Own compilation based on World Bank and World Integrated Trade Solution data; Державна служба статистики України. Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність; Міністерство економіки України, Reireived from https://www.me.gov.ua/Tags/DocumentsByTag?lang=uk-UA&id=565ab860-7fe2-4f51-8e27-0b70ff06c732&tag=ZovnishnoekonomichnaDiialnist.

The analysis of Ukrainian export dynamics during the specified timeframe highlights a notable shift in trade patterns, particularly evident in exports to the EU and Russia. A discernible downward trajectory is observed in Ukrainian exports to Russia, marking a substantial decline from 23.81% of total exports in 2013 to a mere 0.98% following the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. This significant reduction underscores the necessity for Ukraine to explore alternative markets, with the EU emerging as a prominent focal point.

In contrast to the diminishing exports to Russia, Ukrainian exports to the EU experienced a notable increase over the years. Beginning at 25.61% in 2013, the share of exports to the EU steadily rose to 41.36% in 2018, indicating a growing reliance on the EU market. Although there was a slight decrease to 39.09% in 2021, Ukrainian exports to the EU reached a record high of 63.07% in 2022, underscoring the strategic pivot towards the EU as a primary trading partner. These trends underscore the imperative for Ukrainian exporters to diversify their markets, with the EU emerging as a pivotal destination amid shifting geopolitical dynamics.[13]

Table 3. Overview of Ukraine's Export and Import values for commodity groups 2013, 2021 and 2022 in billions.

Products import	**2013 WLD**	**2013 EU**	**2013 RUS**	**2021 WLD**	**2021 EU**	**2021 RUS**	**2022 WLD**	**2022 EU**	**2022 RUS**
Food and live animals-import	6.170	2.270	0.650	6.200	3.050	0.030	5.450	2.910	0.000
Beverages and tobacco-import	1.060	0.320	0.170	1.470	0.870	0.020	1.080	0.660	0.000
Crude materials. inedible. except fuels-import	2.220	0.470	0.500	2.110	0.700	0.170	1.400	0.580	0.030
Mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials-import	21.240	3.010	14.460	14.520	3.090	3.850	16.080	8.120	1.430
Animal and vegetable oils, fats and waxes-import	0.360	0.090	0.010	0.470	0.080	0.000	0.360	0.120	0.000

[13] World Bank. Ukraine's exports and imports 2013-2022, retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL?end=2022&locations=US&start=2010; Державна служба статистики України. Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність, retrieved from: https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/.

Chemicals and related products, n.e.s.-import	11.180	5.960	1.920	14.000	7.510	0.780	10.220	5.780	0.140
Manufactured goods classified chiefly by material-import	10.570	4.370	2.500	10.700	4.480	1.180	7.730	3.740	0.210
Machinery and transport equipment-import	18.390	7.730	2.650	25.260	10.970	0.650	18.750	8.210	0.110
Miscellaneous manufactured articles-import	4.860	1.390	0.290	6.190	1.810	0.130	5.290	1.440	0.020
Commodities and transactions not classified elsewhere in the SITC-import	0.950	0.300	0.090	0.450	0.130	0.000	3.020	2.350	0.000

Products export	**2013 WLD**	**2013 EU**	**2013 RUS**	**2021 WLD**	**2021 EU**	**2021 RUS**	**2022 WLD**	**2022 EU**	**2022 RUS**
Food and live animals-export	10.800	2.530	1.580	19.680	4.230	0.050	16.850	8.590	0.000
Beverages and tobacco-export	0.700	0.020	0.230	0.850	0.120	0.000	0.380	0.090	0.000
Crude materials. inedible. except fuels-export	8.120	3.610	1.200	13.330	6.000	0.860	10.090	7.690	0.190
Mineral fuels. lubricants and related materials-export	2.870	1.000	0.220	0.860	0.640	0.040	1.310	1.170	0.010
Animal and vegetable oils. fats and waxes-export	3.430	0.440	0.030	7.930	2.600	0.000	7.450	3.850	0.000
Chemicals and related products. n.e.s.-export	4.090	0.720	1.000	3.300	1.350	0.290	1.890	1.130	0.050
Manufactured goods classified chiefly by material-export	20.080	4.920	4.560	20.480	8.830	1.520	10.210	6.770	0.230
Machinery and transport equipment-export	10.260	2.060	5.310	6.930	4.020	0.910	5.160	3.900	0.120
Miscellaneous manufactured articles-export	2.320	0.900	0.900	2.920	2.100	0.230	2.440	2.010	0.030

Commodities and transactions not classified elsewhere in the SITC-export	0.640	0.020	0.030	0.350	0.020	0.000	0.040	0.010	0.000

Source: Own compilation based on data from World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution and World Bank; Державна служба статистики України.

The comparisons made regarding Ukrainian exports and imports with the EU and Russia reveal a notable decrease in trade value with Russia, mirroring trends observed across various trade sectors. Specifically, after the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2022, the trade value for exports and imports in four specific groups of goods plummeted to USD 0.000 billion: food and live animals; beverages and tobacco; animal and vegetable oils, fats, and waxes; and commodities and transactions not classified elsewhere. Additionally, there were significant declines in trade values across the remaining eight groups. Conversely, there is an upward trend in the values of Ukrainian exports and imports with the EU, which is further supported by the overall trade dimension between Ukraine and the EU. The gradual shift away from trade reliance on Russia has been ongoing since 2013, with the most notable changes occurring in the year of the Russian military aggression. Consequently, Ukraine has actively sought European and global markets for its goods as a strategic response.

Conclusion

The analysis of Ukrainian trade dynamics amidst the backdrop of the conflict with Russia underscores significant shifts in trade patterns and strategic orientations. The Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2022 has had profound implications for European trade dynamics, particularly in the case of Ukraine, which experienced a notable decrease in trade value with Russia across various sectors. This decline reflects a strategic reorientation away from reliance on the Russian market, prompting Ukraine to actively seek alternative markets, notably the EU.

The data presented highlights a clear upward trend in Ukrainian exports and imports with the EU, indicating a growing reliance on the European market. This trend is further corroborated by the overall trade dimension between Ukraine and the EU, which has seen consistent growth over the years. Conversely, trade with Russia has witnessed a significant downturn, particularly following the events of 2022, necessitating a diversification of trading partners and markets.

The hypothesis of this chapter concerning the significant role of the EU in Ukrainian trade, along with an increase in the EU's share of Ukrainian exports from 2013 to 2022, was fully substantiated. Conversely, 2021 witnessed a significant surge in demand for goods, leading to increased trade between the EU and Ukraine. Moreover, the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 further intensified trade between the EU and Ukraine, with various measures and instruments implemented to facilitate Ukrainian sales, consequently solidifying the EU's role in Ukrainian trade policy. Since 2013, the EU's share of Ukraine's exports has steadily increased from 25.61% to 63.07% in 2022, showcasing a consistent upward trend. Conversely, the case study of imports of goods from the EU to Ukraine demonstrated a

substantial increase, representing 33.66% in 2013 and reaching nearly fifty percent (48.87%) of Ukraine's total imports in 2022, highlighting the growing importance of the EU as a trading partner for Ukraine.

The redefinition of Ukrainian foreign policy, influenced by the ongoing conflict with Russia and geopolitical imperatives, has underscored the importance of strategic partnerships with European and global markets. This strategic pivot towards the EU as a primary trading partner aligns with Ukraine's broader foreign policy goals and aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration. Overall, the analysis underscores the resilience and adaptability of Ukraine's trade policies amidst geopolitical turmoil. By actively seeking new markets and partnerships, particularly with the EU, Ukraine aims to mitigate the adverse effects of the conflict with Russia and position itself for long-term economic growth and stability in the European context.

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The Rise of Minilateralism and Small Regional Groups in Europe's Changing Geopolitical Theatre

Curtis D. Cordon

Abstract. Major war has returned to the European continent and revisionist powers seek to overthrow the liberal rules-based order that has been so prevalent since the end of the Cold War. Additionally, a rise in populist nationalism sentiment is sweeping Europe. The EU has expanded in size to become what some would describe as an unwieldy body, unable to overcome veto rights and achieve consensus. Nationalist movements seek to undermine what the EU has achieved. In this changing world, one aspect that stands out is the significant increase and activity of Small Regional Groups (SRG) and the policy agreements reached in groups such as the Bucharest Nine, Three Seas Initiative, Slavkov Triangle, and Visegrad Group among other. This paper will analyse the importance that regional groups are having in preserving the liberal rules-based order in Europe. The analysis of SRGs will include how they achieve consensus, what they do to promote and further EU integration, and what effect they are having on economic prosperity, energy independence, and security cooperation. Additionally, as Ukraine and Moldova seek EU membership, the effect of their full membership or their observer status in SRGs will be analysed to see what these steps deliver in the form of closer cooperation with the West and potential full EU membership. Ultimately, this essay seeks to demonstrate that the collective bargaining power of SRG is a strength and delivers positive momentum toward EU integration and that SRGs are an effective tool to help preserve the rules-based liberal order.

Keywords: small regional groups, minilateralism, Visegrad, Three Seas Initiative, Slavkov Triangle

Introduction

On the eve of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, the heads of state from Germany, France, and Poland met for the first time in over eleven years under the Weimar Triangle format to address the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Europe.[1] Numerous other groups, such as the Slavkov Format, chose to meet in the days preceding the worrisome build-up of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border.[2] Russia has spurred many of Europe's regional groups to hold summits. In the days following the invasion, leaders from various European countries, including those from the Bucharest Nine (B9), gathered in regional group formats to strategize and coordinate their response to this blatant disregard for European security and the rules-based international order. These emergency meetings drew attention and attendance from prominent leaders such as Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO, and Ursula Von Der Leyen,

[1] Oliver Noyan, "Germany, France, and Poland Team Up to De-escalate the Ukraine Conflict," EurActiv, February 9, 2022, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/germany-france-and-poland-team-up-to-de-escalate-the-ukraine-conflict/.

[2] Ivan Korcok (@IvanKorcok), "Safely landing in Bratislava after the joint trip of #Slavkov FM to #Kiyv & #Donbas. Many thanks to @janlipavsky & @a_schallenberg for two intensive days of talks about European security. Committed to diplomatic solution of current tensions in the east of Ukraine ," Twitter, February 8, 2022, https://twitter.com/IvanKorcok/status/1491131054664871937.

President of the European Commission.[3] Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz succinctly captured the sentiment: "We are all united by one goal – to maintain peace in Europe through diplomacy and by sending clear messages and a common willingness to act in unity."[4] As the war has progressed over the last two years, one message has remained clear: the growing presence of small regional groups and the minilateralism they represent are pivotal for advancing security and cooperation in Europe.

Europe is a continent rich in diverse nations that have a deep history of regional alliances and cooperation. After WWII, in an effort to secure peace and stability in the world and to prevent a return to the horrors of war, several large multilateral organisations were established in Europe and throughout the world. Despite their intent, the varied and distinct interests, cultures, and histories within Europe have meant that the multilateral approaches have often proven inefficient and become mired in gridlock. European countries have long sought collective bargaining and a strength-in-numbers approach, and this has been demonstrated through broad multilateral organisations and alliances like the EU and NATO. However, in consensuses-based multilateral organisations, finding common ground has often not meant finding a solution that makes everyone happy, but choosing a compromise that leaves everyone equally unhappy. To bypass the slow and cumbersome multilateral processes, and in light of the modern and varied threats that European countries face, Europeans have increasingly looked to what Moises Naim, editor-in-chief of *Foreign Policy* magazine, describes as minilateralism – that is, "to bring to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem."[5] Small Regional Groups and minilateralism are emerging as a cornerstone of European security and prosperity. As Europe navigates the complexities of a multipolar world, particularly countering Russian aggression and Chinese expansion, these smaller, regionally focused alliances will bypass broader gridlock at the multilateral level to bolster collective defence, foster economic integration, and strengthen critical infrastructure. Minilateralism is poised to play a pivotal role in an uncertain geopolitical landscape.

While nearly all regional groups comfortably fall under the umbrella term of minilateralism, small regional groups in Europe are quite varied and diverse in their organisation, aims, and scope of participation. However, certain characteristics frequently serve as common denominators among regional groups. These groups typically have more targeted initiatives and a smaller number of participants (often 3 or 4).[6] Some regional groups are defence-oriented, others focused on trade and others on infrastructure, but a common denominator is that realism underpins these groups' strategies for leveraging power through

[3] European Commission, "President von der Leyen Participates in Bucharest Nine (B9) Summit in Warsaw and Special NATO Summit," Neighbourhood and Enlargement, February 25, 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/president-von-der-leyen-participates-bucharest-nine-b9-summit-warsaw-and-special-nato-summit-2022-02-25_en.

[4] Noyan, *art. cit*.

[5] Moises Naim, "Minilateralism," *Foreign Policy*, June 21, 2009, https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/21/minilateralism/.

[6] William T. Tow, "Minilateral Security's Relevance to US Strategy in the Indo-Pacific: Challenges and Prospects," *The Pacific Review* 32, no. 2/ May 2018, pp. 232–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2018.1465457.

cooperation. After all, realism emphasizes the role of power in international relations, and these groups form the very basis of collective bargaining to increase their power through cooperation.[7] Regardless of the groups' stated aims, all have struck a tone of pushing for broader security in Europe in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While the increase of regional groups has been observed the world over, it is Europe that has seen a stark increase in their numbers. Not coincidentally, the further east you move in Europe the higher the number of regional groups you find. Considering that many of these regional groups arose in response to Russian aggression, their concentration in Central and Eastern Europe is unsurprising. Since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the European Union has seen the formation of at least six new regional groups, such as the Bucharest Nine, and Three Seas Initiative,[8] with existing groups also intensifying their activities in response to the annexation.

Case Studies: Minilateralism at Work

To fully illustrate the practical significance of minilateralism and the nuanced roles played by small regional groups in Europe's complex geopolitical landscape, this next section analyses four illustrative case studies of key regional groups. These groups have been selected to showcase the spectrum of differences in scope and organisation of regional groups and demonstrate their efforts in combating Russian aggression through collective bargaining. Drawing on both primary and secondary sources, analysis highlights the tangible benefits and specific contributions these cooperative efforts have had on European security. Despite the diversity of their missions and memberships, these regional groups exemplify the dynamic and resilient spirit of European collaboration in the face of shared challenges.

The Visegrad Group

The Visegrad Group (V4) consists of four Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. It was founded in 1991 as a cultural and political alliance to foster cooperation and further promote European integration and stability in the former Warsaw Pact countries. Today the V4 focuses on a broad array of topics like military cooperation, energy security, and regional development. Significantly, the V4 enhances the visibility and weight of the V4 member countries within NATO when they train, organise, and equip jointly. As NATO countries with geographic proximity on the eastern flank, V4 activities have the opportunity to complement and support broader NATO initiatives with greater visibility; this visibility in turn helps the overall effort to build a strong European defence architecture by strengthening individual member states' military capabilities through shared intelligence, tactics, techniques, and procedures. All of the aforementioned benefits contribute to better interoperability for the V4. The EU has taken note of the V4's close ties, and the subsequent creation of the V4 EU Battlegroup (BG) is an evident result of V4 collaboration in

[7] Stephen M. Walt, "On Minilateralism," *Foreign Policy*, June 23, 2009, https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/23/on-minilateralism/.

[8] Ian Cooper, "Rise of Regional Groups in the EU," Bridge Network, March 30, 2022, https://bridgenetwork.eu/2022/03/30/rise-regional-groups-eu/.

the realm of defence and security.[9] In addition to improving interoperability between the V4 nations, the V4 EU BG has provided the opportunity for exercise and training to partner nations such as Ukraine, Croatia, Latvia, and Lithuania.[10] The case of Ukraine's training with the V4 EU BG is significant in that it increases Ukraine's interoperability with NATO and the Western way of warfighting. This experience and training for Ukraine brings them one step closer and reinforces their desired end state of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The concept of creating the V4 EU BG also demonstrates that regional groups can be noticed by larger multilateral organisations and that they can work within and complement a multilateral framework. A testament of the V4's collaborative efforts in defence and security to emphasize interoperability and enhance military capabilities through joint V4 military training and operations.

Joint ammunition procurement is another bright spot that can be seen from V4 coordination. As published by the V4, "armaments cooperation reached a milestone in 2022 when the first joint V4 ammunition procurement project has come to an implementation phase and the first amount of the procured ammunition was delivered to the Armed Forces of the V4 countries."[11] In a European security construct, it is difficult to overstate how important it is that small nations pool their resources to fund and coordinate armament procurement.

The V4 has Furthered cooperation for defence planning with their "Framework for an Enhanced Visegrad Group Defence Planning Cooperation" which was published in November of 2022.[12] Significantly, this document strengthens V4 countries' ties with NATO by specifically mentioning the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) and listing the NDPP as a main driver for national defence planning.[13]

An additional benefit of the V4 is that of being an additional lever of pressure at a smaller and more intimate level to persuade Hungary to remain committed to the West. The V4 served as a format to warm relations with the West when Hungarian cooperation had receded. The Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Fiala said before the meeting: "The important thing is that we talk to each other. The V4 at the highest level has not met in recent months. It is certainly a useful format that has proved its worth in the past."[14] The types of minilateral formats can thus be useful to bring players back to the multilateral table. Through its concerted efforts in defence, security, and cooperation, the Visegrad Group demonstrates that regional groups indeed can achieve effective collaboration in the face of a challenging geopolitical environment.

The Three Seas Initiative

[9] Visegrad Group, "Defence Cooperation," *Visegrad Group*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/cooperation/defence.
[10] *Ibidem.*
[11] *Ibidem.*
[12] *Ibidem.*
[13] *Ibidem.*
[14] Valeria Zanier, "Visegrad Group: No Rekindling the Romance," Balkan Insight, March 1, 2023, https://balkaninsight.com/2023/03/01/visegrad-group-no-rekindling-the-romance/.

Infrastructure plays a pivotal role in warfighting, and the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) excels in this domain, offering numerous opportunities to enhance European integration and military capability in response to Russian aggression. Initiated in 2015 by the presidents of Poland and Croatia, the 3SI was designed with the overall objective of "preserving and strengthening the unity of the European Union and the Euro-Atlantic space."[15] Initially consisting of 12 EU countries situated between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas, the initiative has expanded in the last year to include Greece – a testament to the success of the organisation.[16] The initiative seeks to fortify European unity with three pillars of effort: infrastructure, energy security, and digital integration, thus "strengthening the economic and social cohesion of the EU as a whole."[17]

The Three Seas Initiative, though not directly focused on defence, has notably shifted its discourse since Russia invaded Ukraine, highlighting how regional groups, even with primary aims beyond defence, can significantly influence, and contribute to broader security considerations. Amid the geopolitical chaos, the 3SI has increased in relevance on the European stage as they press forward with their pillars of effort and even beyond their initial charter. The president of Romania Klaus Iohannis said that the 3SI "must evolve into a more pivotal platform, fortifying both regional and European resilience."[18] Towards that end, the 3SI highlighted at their 2023 summit in Bucharest the member states' commitment to regional connectivity and resilience in the face of Russian aggression against Ukraine. The group publicly declared "We reaffirm that strengthening the infrastructure resilience of dual-use infrastructure in the region for enhanced civilian and military mobility on the North-South axis, in line with the EU Action Plan on Military Mobility, represents a political goal, as well as a responsible investment into our secure future."[19] In line with President Iohannis' admonition that the 3SI must evolve, five of the twenty-one joint declarations from the 2023 summit directly highlighted the tense geopolitical situation and condemned Russia for their "irresponsible acts" and called attention to the illegal hybrid pressures on the Republic of Moldova and the challenges Russia's "illegal actions" bring to the European continent.[20] This type of geopolitical posturing by a block of 13 European countries sends a powerful message of unity in official declarations.

The 3SI has notably advanced European unity by embracing partner nation participation, particularly in the aftermath of Ukraine's invasion. This move, a direct response to challenges to European integration, saw the 3SI officially welcoming Ukraine to partake in its energy and infrastructure projects as a partner nation. The Prime Minister of Poland,

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[15] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, "Three Seas Initiative - Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland - Gov.pl Website," www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/three-seas-initiative, accessed February 19, 2024.
[16] Catalina Mihai and Sofia Mandilara, "Three Seas Initiative to Enlarge With Greece Says Romanian President," EurActiv, 30 Aug. 2023, www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/three-seas-initiative-to-enlarge-with-greece-says-romanian-president.
[17] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, "Three Seas Initiative".
[18] Mihai and Mandilara, *art. cit.*
[19] Three Seas Initiative, "Joint Declaration of the Eighth Summit of the Three Seas Initiative," https://3seas.eu/media/joint-declaration-of-the-eighth-summit-of-the-three-seas-initiative, accessed February 19, 2024.
[20] *Ibidem.*

Mateusz Morawiecki, underscored the sentiment by stating, “3SI is impossible without a free and sovereign Ukraine.”[21] Amid escalating tensions in the Black Sea region, Moldova received an official invitation to join the initiative as a partner, further demonstrating the 3SI’s commitment to supporting neighbouring countries under threat. This expansion illustrates the 3SI’s evolution beyond its initial scope and three foundational pillars, by rallying support for Ukraine and potentially facilitating infrastructure projects with dual-use capabilities for military logistics if necessary. As the 3SI forges ahead with its ambitious agenda, it emerges as a pivotal example of successful regional integration, highlighting its openness to expansion to foster a free and cohesive Europe.

The Bucharest Nine

In the wake of escalating tensions along NATO’s Eastern Flank, the Bucharest Nine (B9) has emerged as a unified collective voice for NATO’s Central and Eastern European members. Their unity and collective stance lend significant weight to their declarations, capturing the attention of high-profile politicians and great powers alike.

Initiated at the behest of the President of Romania Klaus Iohannis and the President of Poland Andrzej Duda, the B9 was established in 2015 in the historic city of Bucharest as a direct response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea formed the previous year – a move that significantly unsettled the Eastern European landscape.[22] Comprising Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia, this strategic and defence-oriented alliance represents the Eastern European members within NATO, united by a common vision of bolstering the alliance’s eastern defences in response to the growing security challenges of a multipolar world. The founding of the B9 not only symbolized a commitment to mutual defence but also a collective effort to enhance NATO’s deterrence and defence posture along its eastern flank. The B9 has successfully leveraged its collective weight to secure high-level meetings with the President of the United States and the Secretary General of NATO, in which they have promoted collaborative security initiatives to strengthen the regional security architecture of NATO’s eastern neighbourhood.[23]

Since its inception, the B9 has actively promoted a range of initiatives aimed at bolstering the collective defence of its member states, but nowhere has the B9 been more successful than in its push to raise the visibility of NATO’s Eastern Flank countries and demonstrate that they can speak with one voice both behind closed door and in public. These efforts culminate in the B9’s annual summit, strategically held before the NATO summit, allowing the group to consolidate its stance and influence NATO’s broader agenda. Time and again the B9 has demonstrated its willingness to put pressure on NATO for deliverables to

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[21] Ukrinform, “Trimora Nemozhlyve Bez Vil'noi Ta Suverennoi Ukrainy: Moraveckij” (Trimora is Impossible Without Free and Sovereign Ukraine: Moravetskyi), https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3501317-trimora-nemozlive-bez-vilnoi-ta-suverennoi-ukraini-moraveckij.html, accessed February 19, 2024.

[22] Sergy Gerasymchuk, “Bucharest Nine: Looking for Cooperation on NATO's Eastern Flank,” The Foreign Policy Council “The Ukrainian Prism,” July 2019, https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/15574.pdf.

[23] Office of the President of Poland, “Joint Statement by the Leaders of Bucharest Nine,” accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.president.pl/news/joint-statement-by-the-leaders-of-bucharest-nine65068.

NATO summit that are in line with B9 countries' strategic direction.[24] This approach has both benefited NATO and the B9 nations. In 2023, the B9 consistently advocated for critical security initiatives, including the strengthening of Air and Missile Defence systems and the support of a rotational model for military assets in Eastern Europe.[25] NATO benefits from the B9 summit as it serves as a sounding board to gauge public reaction to ongoing initiatives. In the B9s summit they echoed multiple NATO lines of effort such as their support for accession to the alliance of Finland and Sweden, the effort to make 2% of GDP spending towards defence become a floor and not a ceiling, NATO support to Ukraine, and quite significantly, the B9 commended NATO's new regional plans and urged Allies to assign forces to those plans.[26] The ability of NATO and B9 nations to gauge public opinion before the NATO summit is an invaluable aspect of the B9, showing that regional groups and minilateralism can influence and guide larger multilateral efforts.

Conclusion

As Europe's geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, marked by both challenges and opportunities, the growing prominence of small regional groups in Europe and the minilateralism they represent are exemplified by the efforts and engagement of groups such as the Visegrad Group, the Three Seas Initiative, and the Bucharest Nine. These groups have not only demonstrated unparalleled agility to respond to immediate threats such as Russian aggression but have laid a foundation for deeper engagement and cohesion in Europe. Regional groups in Europe have found the magic number and successfully brought to the table "the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem."[27] Through targeted collaboration, shared vision, and collective bargaining, these groups have firmly established their crucial role in European security and broader European integration. The rise in the activity of regional groups shows increasing evidence that minilateralism can unite nations around specific objectives to find a more rapid and cohesive response than what a multilateral format would provide. As Europe navigates the uncertainties of a multipolar world, the strategic impact of minilateral alliances will stand as a testament to Europe's ability to adapt, firmly positioning minilateralism as a force for strengthening European security and prosperity.

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[24] Office of the President of the Slovak Republic, "Joint Statement of the Presidents of B9," accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.prezident.sk/en/article/spolocne-vyhlasenie-prezidentov-b9/.
[25] *Ibidem.*
[26] *Ibidem.*
[27] Naim, *art. cit.*

https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/diplomacy/baltic-states-working-to-expel-russia-from-council-of-europe.a447806/.

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The "Assistance Dilemma": The Impact of Russian Disinformation on Moldova's Choice Between Neutrality and Foreign Security Assistance.

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Abstract. Geopolitical rivalry is visibly back at the heart of Europe. In the last decade, the Eastern part of the continent rapidly shifted from a "Common" to a "Contested" neighbourhood between Moscow and Brussels.[2] The outbreak of a new wave of hostilities in Ukraine has further destabilized conflict-prone areas and exacerbated the regional insecurity. Moldova, given its strategic position, has been harshly affected by the ongoing confrontation. NATO and the European Union, via the Common Security and Defence Policy, thus committed to synergetic actions for shoring up the country against the mounting 'population-centric' hybrid warfare.[3] Russia, indeed, perceives of paramount importance keeping Chișinău anchored to its sphere of influence, as firstly underlined by the Kozyrev doctrine in 1994. Leveraging the "constitutional neutrality" of the country, the Kremlin is determined to use deception, disinformation, and meta-narratives to foster dissensus in the Moldovan society about the growing engagement of the incumbent government with the West. Transatlantic institutions must now face a pressing paradox, as accommodating further the needs of Chișinău in the defence domain risk to unleash a new wave of disinformation-driven dissensus. After illustrating the Western measures in place, the present analysis looks into the role of social media in diffusing narratives forged by tabloids and local political representatives connected with Russian authorities. Given the approaching electoral campaign for the 2024 Moldovan presidential voting, the paper intends to support NATO StratCom Centre and EEAS StratCom EastTask Force in preventing scenarios of "manufactured insurrection" similar to those occurred in Crimea and Donbas in 2014.

Keywords: NATO, security assistance, Russia, Moldova, disinformation

Introduction

Geopolitical rivalry is visibly back at the heart of Europe. In the last decade, the Eastern part of the continent has rapidly shifted from a "common" to a "contested" neighbourhood between Moscow and Brussels.[4] The ongoing Russian large-scale invasion of Ukraine has further deteriorated regional instability. Moldova has been particularly affected by the ongoing war, lending to the outbreak of massive anti-government protests earlier this year. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union, via the Common Security and Defence Policy, have thus openly committed to synergetic actions for shoring up the defence of the

[1] This article was originally published in *Atlantica Magazine*, under the title "Forced Polarisation: Disinformation on EU and NATO Security Assistance to Moldova," on May 14, 2023, available at https://www.atlantic-forum.com/atlantica/forced-polarization-disinformation-on-eu-and-nato-security-assistance-to-moldova".

[2] Laure Delcour, "From a 'Common' to a 'Contested' Neighbourhood: Connecting Levels of Analysis in EU–Russia Interaction," in Tatiana Romanova and Maxine David (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Russia Relations*, London: Routledge, 2021, pp. 392-402.

[3] Dumitru Minzarari, "Failing to Deter Russia's War against Ukraine: The Role of Misperception," *SWP*, April 22, 2022, https://doi.org/10.18449/2022C33.

[4] *Ibidem.*

country against mounting hybrid warfare. Foreign Information Manipulations and Interferences (FIMIs) are now targeting external security assistance with the goal to exacerbate tensions in the already polarised Moldovan society. NATO and the EU must now face a pressing paradox, as further accommodating the needs of Chișinău in the defence domain risks unleashing a new wave of disinformation-driven dissensus.

Information Warfare, Evidence from Crimea to Moldova

"An explosion in security threats". This is, in the words of Moldovan Interior Minister Ana Revenco, the situation afflicting the country since the beginning of the Russian offensive in Ukraine in February 2022.[5] President Maia Sandu has repeatedly stressed how her administration has been fighting a hybrid war unleashed by Kremlin interferences.[6] Russia has, indeed, demonstrated an effective capacity to leverage contingent circumstances to exacerbate rooted structural problems in Moldova. The deteriorated regional stability has just added more gunpowder to a prolonged unstable political situation. Despite its pivotal geopolitical position, this small country has been exposed to low living standards, high emigration levels, widespread corruption, and chronic economic stagnation. Moreover, Moldovan society is ethically and linguistically heterogeneous with Russian (13%), Ukrainian (4%), and Găgăuzian (3%) minorities living alongside the Romanian-speaking population.[7] The political landscape is even more divided by those backing integration with the European Union and those in favour of reinforcing ties with Moscow, such as former president Igor Dodon, the Socialist-Communist bloc, and the pro-Russian Shor Party funded by the exiled oligarch Ilan Șor. This political divergence leads to frequent protests against central authorities, which are now growing in scale and intensity. Secessionist tendencies are also a persistent challenge, with the Transnistrian region governed since 1992 by the self-proclaimed Pridnestrovian Republic shored up by a contingent of 1,500 Russian 'peacekeepers' from the Forces Operational Group, while the Gagauzian district is claiming increasing autonomy. In this troubled context, the consequences of the war in Ukraine have been severe: skyrocketing inflation, a rise in gas prices by Russia, and a massive influx of 100,000 refugees. To cope with the mounting pressure, authorities in Chișinău and Kyiv activated the EU accession procedure, which was perceived by Moscow as a further erosion of its influence in the area.[8]

Since the "Kozyrev doctrine" in 1994, the Russian establishment has conceived countries once part of the Soviet Union as a "zone of privileged interest", a "Russian World"

[5] Thomas Escritt, "Fake Bombs and Failed Coup: Moldova Smolders on Border of Russia's War," Reuters, March 10, March, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/fake-bombs-failed-coup-moldova-smolders-border-russias-war-2023-03-10/.

[6] Euronews, "Moldova Threatened by 'Hybrid Warfare Generated by Russia' to Destabilise Government," March 15, 2023, https://www.euronews.com/2023/03/15/moldova-threatened-by-hybrid-warfare-generated-by-russia-to-destabilise-government.

[7] OSCE, "HCNM Ethnobarometer Moldova – 2020," Centre for Sociological, Politological and Psychological Analysis and Investigations CIVIS, 2021, https://www.osce.org/hcnm/505306.

[8] Bob Deen and Wouter Zweers, "Moldova's Vulnerabilities amid War in Ukraine," Clingendael, September 30, 2022, https://www.clingendael.org/publication/moldovas-vulnerabilities-amid-war-ukraine.

(*Rusky mir*) to be kept anchored to Moscow.[9] Determined to preserve a leading role in the post-Soviet space, the Putin presidency reintroduced KBG-time "active measures" (*activnie meropryatia*), meaning "overt and covert techniques for influencing events and behaviour in, and the actions of, foreign societies".[10] The well-noted concept of 'hybrid warfare' (*gibridnaya voyna*) was later coined by General Gerasimov to describe the synergistic use of military and non-military actions to achieve effects both in the physical and psychological dimension of conflict.[11] Hoffman and Larson emphasize the critical role of information warfare based on the manipulation of cognitive perceptions by altering the surrounding informational environment.[12] Shaded by a vail of deception (*maskirovka*), multiple instruments of persuasion or manipulation are tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of the local socio-political context to deeply penetrate into civil societies.[13] The final goal of this 'battle of perceptions' is to frustrate and confuse the public opinion, opening an enduring internal front to destabilize the targeted state.[14] As stressed by Linebarger, to be fully effective these measures should be "combined with a precise message or narrative".[15] Disinformation (*dezinformatsiya*) is a pivotal element of this hybrid warfare. In fact, manipulated information re-constructing existing narratives is disseminated via various channels to mislead public opinion.[16] Externally forged narratives can be injected into the public debate using state-controlled media such as Sputnik and Russia Today or even local tabloids, then amplified in social network platforms like Facebook or Telegram. Usually, the circulation of a narrative in social media is facilitated by fake profiles created in 'bot factories' such as the St Petersburg Internet Research Agency, assisted by intelligence units like the 642nd Informational-Psychological Warfare Group of the GRU.[17] Additionally, the conveyed message is reinforced and legitimized through speeches of local political proxies and official communications from Russian diplomatic missions. The variety of channels allows Russian propaganda not only to reach a large audience but even to make

[9] Litera Bohuslav, "The Kozyrev Doctrine - a Russian Variation on the Monroe Doctrine," *Perspectives* vol.4/1994, pp. 45–52.
[10] Roy Godson and Richard Shultz, "Soviet Active Measures: Distinctions and Definitions," *Defence Analysis*, 1985, pp. 101–110.
[11] Frank Hoffman, "On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs. Hybrid Threats," *War on the Rocks*, July 28, 2014, https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/.
[12] Eric Larson et al., "Foundations of Effective Influence Operations: A Framework for Enhancing Army Capabilities," RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2009, https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG654.html.
[13] Jiri Valenta and Leni Valenta, "Why Putin Wants Syria," *Middle East Quarterly* vol. 23, no. 2/2016, pp. 1-17.
[14] Linda Robinson et al., "Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses," RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2018. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1772.html.
[15] Paul Linebarger, *Psychological Warfare*, Nevada City: Gateways Books & Tapes, 2010.
[16] Dean Jackson, "Issue Brief: Distinguishing Disinformation From Propaganda, Misinformation and 'Fake News'," The National Endowment For Democracy, October 17, 2017, https://www.ned.org/issue-brief-distinguishing-disinformation-from-propaganda-misinformationand-fake-news/.
[17] The Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces (Glavnoje Upravlenije General'nogo shtaba Vooruzhonnykh), also known as GRU, is a foreign military intelligence agency of the Russian Ministry of Defence responsible for military operations. It is part of the network of intelligence agencies and units of the Russian Federation together with the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the Federal Security Service (FSB), and the Federal Protective Service (FSO).

more persuasive a fabricated narrative via rapid, continuous, and repetitive flows of manipulated information.[18]

The described *modus operandi* was widely applied in Crimea and in the Donbas in 2014. Civil unrest against central authorities was encouraged by forged reports in social media describing attacks on the Russian-speaking population by neofascist bands ready to unleash an "ethical genocide".[19] Once anxiety in public opinion was exacerbated, contacts with local personalities and disinformation about a "legal responsibility to protect" Russian minorities abroad triggered the formation of local self-defence militia and staged the ground to cover military interventions, such as the taking of Simferopol by "little green men" (later confirmed to be troops without insignia of the 45th Guards Spetsnaz Brigade). As eloquently described by Snyder, the secession of Crimea is "not a reaction to actual threats but rather an [external] attempt to activate a threat, so that violence would change the world".[20] In this regard, well-staged disinformation campaigns maximise confusion and uncertainty in the population, undermining confidence in institutions, delegitimising political decisions and leading to a situation of chaos. This pattern is clear in Moldova, where "Russia is using hybrid warfare in a way that is tailored to the idiosyncrasies of local context".[21] Here, Moscow encouraged a 'controlled chaos' characterised by mounting societal polarization and anti-government mobilization.[22] As tensions and paranoia grow high in the country, US President Security Advisor Kirby mentioned the risk of "manufactured insurrection".[23] Even Maia Sandu, at the Davos Summit, highlighted the precautious situation in Moldova, encouraging her compatriots to engage in a "serious debate about the capacity to defend ourselves".[24]

EU, NATO and the "Assistance Paradox"

In 2022, with threats to stability of Moldova reaching an unprecedented peak, Chișinău decided to strengthen security ties with NATO and the European Union. Both organisations pledged to support the Sandu government via packages of tailored measures able to enhance the resilience of the country while preserving its "constitutional neutrality."

On one side, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the diplomatic branch of the European Union, has constantly increased the level of financial assistance through the

[18] Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, "The Russian 'Firehose of Falsehood' Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It," RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2016, https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html.
[19] Juris Pupcenoks and Eric Seltzer, "Russian Strategic Narratives on R2P in the 'Near Abroad'," *Nationalities Papers* vol. 49, no. 4/2021, pp. 757–775.
[20] Timothy Snyder, "Crimea: Putin vs. Reality," *The New York Review of Books*, March 7, 2014, https://www.nybooks.com/online/2014/03/07/crimea-putin-vs-reality/.
[21] Denis Cenușa, "Twitter Facebook Send This Page to a Friend Moldova's Neutrality Dilemma," *International Politics and Society*, 31 May 2022.
[22] Mark Galeotti, "Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe," The European Council on Foreign Relations, September 1, 2017, https://ecfr.eu/publication/controlling_chaos_how_russia_manages_its_political_war_in_europe/.
[23] US President Security Advisor John Kirby, quoted in "White House Says Russia Preparing To Annex More Ukrainian Territory," RFE/RL, July 19, 2022, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-us-kirby-annex-donbas/31950917.html.
[24] Suzanne Lynch, "Time to join NATO? Moldova Eyes Joining 'a Larger Alliance'," Politico, January 20, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/maia-sandu-moldova-nato-alliance-joining-ukraine-war-russia-invasion/.

European Peace Facility (EPF). This off-EU budget mechanism linked to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) avoids tedious unanimity votes in the Council in order to allocate significant defence investments to partner countries in need. For Moldova, the support package totals 47 million euros, which represents a crucial amount considering that the total defence budget of the country reaches just 85 million euros. Concretely, the resources are meant to provide non-lethal equipment to enhance operational effectiveness, interoperability, and crisis-management capabilities. This includes cutting-edge communication technologies, logistic materials, transport trucks, reconnaissance UAVs as well as training for cyber-defence, medical, and engineering units. Among the different forms of aid activated with the EPF, the most important is the procurement of Estonian long-range surveillance radars to counter the recent increase of Russian missiles crossing Moldovan airspace.[25] Parallelly, the FRONTEX agency deployed a Task Force of border guards to support the long-standing European Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) between Moldova and the Odesa oblast of Ukraine, which was followed by the announcement of a CSDP mission to set off early-warning systems against hybrid threats.[26]

On the other side, recent assistance from NATO has been focused on training to reform and modernize the Moldovan Army. Particularly, the NATO Liaison Office in Chisinau agreed with local authorities on a Professional Development Programme to increase the responsiveness of their units. Given its neutral status, interactions of Moldova with NATO under the Euro-Atlantic Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework has always been limited to a few specific initiatives like a cyber defence laboratory, programmes to enhance education in military academies, participation in the Disaster Response Coordination centre, and involvement in PfP exercises for peacekeeping standards.[27] However, the current government has also taken steps to increase bilateral defence ties with individual NATO member states including Germany, Romania, and the United Kingdom, as well as demonstrated interest in upgrading its political relations with the Atlantic alliance.[28] After the NATO Madrid Summit in 2022 addressed issues of logistic capacity in Moldova, its Ministry of Foreign Affairs was invited for the first time to a ministerial meeting of the Alliance, organised in Bucharest at the end of the year.[29] Secretary General Stoltenberg even declared that NATO is "evaluating ways to protect non-member countries such as Moldova", while Sandu did not excluded the possibility in the future to join "a larger alliance".[30] Despite the fact that the creation of a flexible force figures as a priority to defend against possible adversaries, covert operations, or

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[25] Andrew Rettman, "EU Buying Radar for Moldova, as Russian Missiles Fly Overhead," *euobserver.com*, March 14, 2023, https://euobserver.com/world/156824.

[26] Carolina Străjescu, "European Union Mission to Moldova for Security Consultations in Early Summer," *radiomoldova.md,* March 3, 2023, https://radiomoldova.md/p/7501/european-union-mission-to-moldova-for-security-consultations-in-early-summer.

[27] Since 2014, Moldova has deployed roughly 40 troops in support of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).

[28] For instance, Berlin started the delivery to Moldova of 19 Piranha-3H armoured personnel carriers (APCs).

[29] Iulian Ernst, "Moldova Attends First NATO Summit but Says Membership Is Not an Option in Bucharest," intellinews.com, December 1, 2022, https://www.intellinews.com/moldova-attends-first-nato-summit-but-says-membership-is-not-an-option-264005/.

[30] Andrei Chirileasa, "NATO Evaluates Ways to Protect Non-member Countries such as Moldova," February 14, 2023, https://www.romania-insider.com/nato-ways-protect-non-member-countries-moldova; Lynch, "Time to join NATO?."

limited interventions, its establishment is still in an embryonic phase, with the first batch of the 19 Piranha APC package delivered by Germany just in January 2023.[31] Another key priority is the air defence system, which has just a few radar technologies and still relies on forty-year-old S-125 anti-aircraft missiles or even older 57mm anti-aircraft guns (S-60). Targeted investments from the EU and NATO in the procurement of modern transport vehicles and radar, training practices, and systems to repel cyberattacks indubitably mitigate different mentioned deficiencies. However, the Moldovan army urgently requires considerable military supplies to increase their combat effectiveness. But this support comes with a hidden 'paradox'.

In a contest of growing societal polarization, public opinion has become extremely sensitive to political discourses on defence relations with external actors given the "neutral status" enshrined in the Moldovan Constitution. Russia weaponized such debates by manipulating information on Western military assistance to fuel the fire of instability. Now, the dilemma of "cooperating with NATO versus neutrality" is a key narrative.[32] Already in 2016, an anti-NATO rally fomented by manipulated information was able to hamper the circulation of some US vehicles taking part in the "Dragon Pioneer" joint exercises in the northern city of Negrești. After all, as stated by former KGB General Kalugin, during the Cold War disinformation activities used "to drive wedges in the Western community alliances of all sorts, particularly NATO" by "weakening its image in the eyes of the people".[33] Moscow was also able to 'ethicize the debate' concerning Chisinau's rapprochement with the EU, creating deep divides between the various ethno-linguist groups.[34] Now, disinformation on evolving security relations with the Atlantic alliance and the EU are re-framed to cultivate narratives that exacerbate fear in people about the danger of triggering Russian retaliation and getting drawn into a large-scale conflict. Such a criticality was repeatedly stressed by President Sandu, who remarked how "all the rhetoric of the opposition is false because the EU provides us with non-lethal equipment even though we need ammunition. […] What will we do if Russia attacks us? will we send army to defend us with a hoe? We don't want anyone to drag us into a war, but this is a reality we must be prepared for".[35]

Disinformation-Driven Polarisation in Moldova

[31] Tanas Alexander, "Moldova Needs $275 Million to Modernise Armed Forces," Reuters, April 13, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moldova-needs-275-mln-modernise-armed-forces-defence-official-2023-04-13/.

[32] Denis Cenușa, "Moldova's Neutrality Dilemma," *International Politics and Society,* May 31, 2022, https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/moldovas-neutrality-dilemma-5967/.

[33] Raphael S. Cohen and Linda Robinson, "Political Warfare Is Back With A Vengeance," Rand Corporation, Centre for the National Interest, April 12, 2018, https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2018/04/political-warfare-is-back-with-a-vengeance.html.

[34] Vladimir Socor, "Ethnic Factors Affecting Moldova's Debate on Association With the European Union," Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume 11, Issue 33, February 20, 2014, https://jamestown.org/programme/ethnic-factors-affecting-moldovas-debate-on-association-with-the-european-union/.

[35] IPN press Agency, "Maia Sandu: If Russia Attacks Us, We Send Army to Defend Us with a Hoe?," July 7, 2022, https://www.ipn.md/en/maia-sandu-if-russia-attacks-us-will-we-send-army-7965_1091048.html#ixzz7Z0IpROlD.

The disinformation campaign launched between February and August 2022, at the same time as the Russian offensive in southern Ukraine, is a clear example of information warfare. According to the Russian Central Military District command, a military manoeuvre aimed at reaching the city of Odesa to "open a route to Moldova's Trans-Dniester region".[36] The strategy of employing a wide array of Foreign Information Manipulations and Interferences (FIMIs) to destabilize the internal situation and instil a logic of the 'enemy at the gate' in self-governed Transnistria appears functional to military operations in Ukraine. At the end of February, assertive propaganda offensives, including disinformation on NATO and the EU CSDP, started in Moldova. The narrative that NATO was providing weapons to Ukraine through the Republic of Moldova in violation of its neutrality was reported in local tabloid Politnavigator.net, then diffused in Telegram chats.[37] In spring, this initial narrative was reinforced with allegations that Moldova had abandoned its neutrality in favour of NATO, which represented a "threat to the country's very existence".[38] Simultaneously, a series of bomb attacks on military buildings in Transnistria was accompanied by accusations that these were false-flag interventions by the Ukrainian army coordinated by NATO to push Chisinau into the Alliance and accept the deployment of NATO forces on its territory.[39] Finally, in mid-summer disinformation on NATO-backed provocations in Moldova to open a second front in the war in Ukraine was accentuated, together with allegations that the EU was planning to send heavy weaponry to the country.[40] Local politicians, including former president Dodon, claimed that NATO was setting up logistical platforms near Chisinau to deliver military aid to Ukrainian forces in the Odesa oblast.[41]

Such flows of manipulated information heavily destabilized Moldova's political environment. Some analysts like Minzarari stressed the "population-centric" nature of this model of hybrid warfare, not excluding a scenario where a wave of disinformation could have

[36] Dmytro Hubenko, "Russia Eyes Route to Trans-Dniester: What Do We Know?," Deutsche Welle, April 22, 2022, https://www.dw.com/en/russia-eyes-route-to-trans-dniester-what-do-we-know/a-61559127.
[37] Cornel Ciobanu, "FAKE NEWS: NATO Is Providing Weapons to Ukraine via the Republic of Moldova, Which Represents a Breach of the Country's Neutrality Status," February 28, 2022, https://www.veridica.ro/en/fake-news/fake-news-nato-is-providing-weapons-to-ukraine-via-the-republic-of-moldova-which-represents-a-breach-of-the-countrys-neutrality-status.
[38] Независимая газета, "Молдавия отказалась от постоянного нейтралитета в пользу НАТО", (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Moldova abandoned permanent neutrality in favour of NATO), May 19 2022, https://www.ng.ru/cis/2022-05-19/5_8440_moldova.html; "Disinfo: NATO Will Not Defend Its members in the Event of a Conflict with Russia," Veridica, April 11, 2022, https://www.veridica.ro/en/disinformation/disinformation-nato-will-not-defend-its-members-in-the-event-of-a-conflict-with-russia.
[39] Sputnik in "Disinfo: The West Is Destabilising Moldova To Justify Military And Political Annexation By Romania," *euvsdisinfo.eu*, June 6, 2022, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/the-west-is-destabilising-moldova-to-justify-military-and-political-annexation-by-romania.
[40] "«НАТО провоцирует горячие головы» Молдавия готовится к новой войне за Приднестровье. Кому нужен второй фронт в Европе?" (NATO provokes hotheads. Moldova is preparing for a new war for Transnistria. Who needs a second front in Europe?), *lenta.ru*, August 28, 2022, https://lenta.ru/articles/2022/08/28/pridnestrovie/; "Молдавия обсуждает со странами ЕС возможные поставки летального оружия," (Moldova is discussing possible supplies of lethal weapons with EU countries), *tass.ru*, June 22, 2022, https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/14807569.
[41] "Додон: Молдова активно закупает у НАТО оружие, чтобы начать стрелять по России," «Россия-24» (Dodon: Moldova is actively purchasing weapons from NATO to start shooting at Russia, Russia-24, July 18, 2022, https://smotrim.ru/video/2444636.

pushed confused mobs to "ask for protection against NATO" interference.[42] The concrete risk was Moscow provoking "manufactured insurgencies" and covered interventions following the 2014 Donbas template. Limited Russian military actions against Moldova were at the time plausible considering the opportunity to open a new front in Ukraine, with the goal of supporting the Kherson-Mykolaiv offensive or even to seize key logistical hubs such as airports and roads to pressure Odesa, already under maritime blockade and threatened by amphibious landings.[43]

A second extensive psychological operation in Moldova, which involved discrediting NATO and EU defence assistance, occurred between December 2022 and March 2023. As gas prices in the country peaked, new disinformation campaigns began to hammer Moldovan society as much as Russian missile strikes hammered border areas in Ukraine. The EEAS East StratCom Task Force assessed that the new wave of FIMIs had a decisive impact in reinforcing previous metanarratives, exacerbating tensions, widening polarization, and bringing thousands of people to the streets.[44] Already in late 2022, posts on Facebook and TikTok cited videos of a British military instructor in the local academy as proof that NATO troops have illegally penetrated the country, calling citizens to "urgently unite against this threat".[45] A huge number of posts shared in Facebook groups and Telegram chats mentioned that the government and Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) led by Sandu were actively negotiating NATO support to develop Moldova's military strategy, exactly when the country was facing severe economic downturn, and while in Paris mass mobs were demanding for "France's withdrawal from the Alliance".[46] Parallelly, Russian media and diplomatic representatives in Moldova started to portray NATO as fully involved in the Ukrainian war, supported by EU satellite intelligence systems.[47] However, it was at the beginning of the new year that this manipulated information

[42] Dumitru Minzarari, "The next war: How Russian hybrid aggression could threaten Moldova," The European Council on Foreign Relations*,* Policy Brief July 29, 2022, https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-next-war-how-russian-hybrid-aggression-could-threaten-moldova/.

[43] Grzegorz Kuczyński, "Russian Invasion Of Ukraine: Fears Of Attack On Odessa," Warsaw Institute Foundation, April 27, 2022, https://warsawinstitute.org/russian-invasion-ukraine-fears-attack-odessa/; Frederick W. Kagan, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Karolina Hird, "Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment," ISW, April 26, 2022, https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-26.

[44] "A Russian Psychological Operation Pressures Moldova," *EUvsDisinfo*, March 3, 2023, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/a-russian-psychological-operation-pressures-moldova/.

[45] "ЧТО ДЕЛАЮТ СОЛДАТЫ НАТО В МОЛДОВЕ," Газета, "СП" (WHAT ARE NATO SOLDIERS DOING IN MOLDOVA," Newspaper, "SP"), November 28, 2022, https://esp.md/ru/kaleydoskop/2022/11/28/chto-delayut-soldaty-nato-v-moldove-video.

[46] Post on Facebook: "19 депутатов PAS полетели в воскресенье в Брюссель в штаб-квартиру НАТО" (19 PAS deputies flew to Brussels on Sunday to NATO headquarters), February 21, 2023; "В Париже прошли протесты" (Protests took place in Paris), February 27, 2023. "Румынский сенатор Диана Шошоакэ: Санду втягивает Молдову в войну!" (Romanian Senator Diana Soshoaca: Sandu is dragging Moldova into war!), February 21, 2023; "НАТО и правительство Великобритании займутся разработкой национальных стратегий безопасности и обороны в Молдове" (NATO and the UK government will develop national security and defence strategies for Moldova), March 23, 2023. See https://www.facebook.com/groups/1464141143898025/search/?q=%D0%9D%D0%90%D0%A2%D0%9E.

[47] Telegram page of the Russian Embassy in Moldova, "«Коллективный Запад» Использует Гражданские Космические Спутники В Военных Целях" (Collective West Uses Civilian Space Satellites for Military Purposes), November 11, 2022, https://moldova.mid.ru/ru/news/kollektivnyy_zapad_ispolzuet_grazhdanskie_kosmicheskie_sputniki_v_voennykh_tselyakh/https://t.me/RusEmbMd/113.

served the most precise and harmful meta-narrative: NATO structures were helping Romania to amass a fully-equipped army at the border to invade and annex Moldova.[48] This main narrative was backed by other (often incompatible) discourses claiming that both Ukraine and Moldova were staging provocations to attack Transnistria.[49] Such assertions, widely disseminated through various web pages and then amplified by massive re-posting in social networks, provided 'proof' of an imminent attack, citing the duplication of the Moldovan defence budget thanks to the European Peace Facility, the supply of armed vehicles via NATO platforms, and waves of Ukrainian missiles violating Moldovan airspace identified by new EU radar.[50] A manipulated video claiming that Romania was massing military equipment on the Moldovan border was again extensively diffused, reaching more than 300,000 views on Telegram, while another post containing alleged images of hundreds of Ukrainian saboteurs penetrating Transnistria with NATO logistical support had 140,000 views.[51] According to different online sources, once a military operation in Transnistria started, Ukraine was also "ready to ask for NATO intervention", as the organisation was already preparing the territory of Moldova for the future theatre of war.[52] Parallel to the disinformation campaign launched in traditional and social media, the forged narrative about NATO-supported invasions was amplified by speeches of local figures like Dodon and Transnistrian de-facto Foreign Minister

[48] Pravda, "Romania Is Concentrating Air Defence Systems to Moldova's Border," *Pravda.ru*, February 27, 2023, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/romania-is-concentrating-air-defence-systems-to-moldovas-border. "ФЕЙК НОВОСТЬ: Украина готовится к нападению на Приднестровье, а армада танков НАТО с территории Румынии прибудет в Крым" (FAKE NEWS: Ukraine is preparing for an attack on Transnistria, and an armada of NATO tanks from Romanian territory will arrive in Crimea), POLITNAVIGATOR.NET, February 20, 2023.

[49] Post on Facebook: "Moldova will be able to identify Ukrainian missiles," March 3, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/groups/1464141143898025/permalink/3305540793091375/. "FAKE NEWS: NATO prepares the territory of the Republic of Moldova to become a future theatre of war," *RUBALTIC.RU*, January 26, 2023, https://www.veridica.ro/en/fake-news/fake-news-nato-pregateste-teritoriul-republicii-moldova-ca-viitor-teatru-de-razboi; Sputnik, quoted in "Disinfo: The West And Kyiv May Start Provocations Against Transnistria," euvsdisinfo.eu, February 27, 2023, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/the-west-and-kyiv-may-start-provocations-against-transnistria; POLITNAVIGATOR.NET, quoted in "ФЕЙК НОВОСТЬ: Украина готовится к нападению на Приднестровье, а армада танков НАТО с территории Румынии прибудет в Крым" (FAKE NEWS: Ukraine is preparing for an attack on Transnistria, and an armada of NATO tanks from Romanian territory will arrive in Crimea), February 2, 2023, https://www.veridica.ro/ru/feiki/feik-novost-ukraina-gotovitsya-k-napadeniyu-na-pridnestrove-a-armada-tankov-nato-s-territorii-rumynii-pribudet-v-krym; Tass.com, quoted in "Ukrainian Nationalists Are Planning a False-flag Operation in Transnistria, Moldova," *EUvsDisinfo*, February 2, 2023, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/romania-is-concentrating-air-defence-systems-to-moldovas-border; Pravda.ru, quoted in "Romania Is Concentrating Air Defence Systems to Moldova's Border," *EUvDisinfo*, February 27, 2023, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/romania-is-concentrating-air-defence-systems-to-moldovas-border. Rubaltic.Ru, quoted in, "ФЕЙК НОВОСТЬ: Брюссель дал согласие за аннексию Республики Молдова Румынией" (FAKE NEWS: Brussels agreed to the annexation of the Republic of Moldova by Romania), verdica, January 29, 2023, https://www.veridica.ro/ru/feiki/feik-novost-bryussel-dal-soglasie-za-anneksiyu-respubliki-moldova-rumyniei.

[50] Moldavskie Vedomosti, quoted in "Disinfo: Moldova Is Preparing for War," *EuvDisinfo.eu*, December 12, 2022, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/moldova-is-preparing-for-war.

[51] Shannon Bond, "From TV to Telegram to TikTok, Moldova is being flooded with Russian propaganda," NPR, March 9, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/03/09/1162045645/from-tv-to-telegram-to-tiktok-moldova-is-being-flooded-with-russian-propaganda.

[52] RUBALTIC.RU, quoted in "FAKE NEWS: NATO Prepares the Territory of the Republic of Moldova to Become a Future Theatre of War," January 26, 2023, https://www.veridica.ro/en/fake-news/fake-news-nato-pregateste-teritoriul-republicii-moldova-ca-viitor-teatru-de-razboi; md.tsargrad.tv, quoted in "Ukraine wanted to use a missile attack to escalate and involve NATO in the conflict," *EUvsDisinfo.eu*, February 2, 2023, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-results/?text=Moldova+NATO.

Ignatiev.[53] Meanwhile, several high-ranking Russian officials such as Deputy Foreign Minister Galuzin and Kremlin Press Secretary Peskov confirmed that a NATO-approved invasion was imminent and reiterated that there would be severe repercussions on Moldovan security in case of a boost in the cooperation between Chisinau and NATO.[54]

The described disinformation activities targeting EU and NATO support to Moldova reinforced Russian large-scale psychological operations meant to exasperate tensions within society. The deteriorating security environment and the economic downfall aggravated fears in the population and fomented opposition to the incumbent government. Between late February and mid-March 2023, mass protests backed by the "Șor Party" flooded the streets in Chisinau against the low living standards and the push toward the West promoted by Sandu. Moldovan authorities reported that the protests were part of a broader Russian-staged attempt to overthrow the government via violent uprisings.[55] Manipulated information flows have been complemented by almost a hundred false bomb alerts all over the country and infiltration in the crowd of military-trained foreigners, including members of the Wagner Group. Mizarari and Parmentier suggest that Moscow's final aim is to foment protracted institutional paralysis or an elite-driven coup in the capital.[56] Although a fully-fledged offensive like the one planned a year before was not plausible, the intelligence sources reported a possible eruption of violence. [57]A situation of widespread chaos and attempted coup would have also facilitated circumscribed military operations from Transnistria to take control of the Chisinau airport and then transport troops to open a new front in the Ukrainian southern flank, adding pressure to Odesa and dragging fresh forces in Kyiv away from the battle of Bakhmut.[58]

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[53] "(ВИДЕО) ДОДОН СЧИТАЕТ ЧТО ГРАЖДАНЕ МОЛДОВЫ ПРОТИВ ИНТЕГРАЦИИ В НАТО" (VIDEO) DODON BELIEVES THAT CITIZENS OF MOLDOVA ARE AGAINST INTEGRATION INTO NATO), Presa Liberă, February 20, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/groups/1599133697033735/permalink/3433629680250785/; "Молдова де-факто переформатирована под стандарт НАТО: там работает миссия Frontex, в министерстве обороны сидят советники США и стран НАТО, подготовка офицеров ведется на натовский базах.— заявил в интервью" (Moldova has de facto been reformatted to NATO standards: the Frontex mission operates there, advisers from the United States and NATO countries sit in the Ministry of Defence, officer training is carried out at NATO bases," he said in an interview), SputnikLive, February 20, 2023, https://vk.com/video-211144754_456241628.

[54] Al Mayadeen, "Providing Moldova with NATO arms could turn out 'disastrous': Russia," December 24, 2022, https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/providing-moldova-with-nato-arms-could-turn-out-disastrous; "Kremlin: Russia's relations with Moldova are very tense," EURACTIV.com, February 2023, https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/kremlin-russias-relations-with-moldova-are-very-tense/.

[55] Wilhelmine Preussen, "Russia Is Planning Coup in Moldova, Says President Maia Sandu," Politico, February 13, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/moldova-president-maia-sandu-russia-attack/.

[56] Florent Parmentier, "I tre scenari di un colpo di Stato pro russo in Moldavia" (Three scenarios for a pro-Russian coup d'etat in Moldova), *Le Grand Continent*, February 13, 2023, https://legrandcontinent.eu/it/2023/02/16/i-tre-scenari-di-un-colpo-di-stato-pro-russo-in-moldavia/.

[57] Radu Eremia, "Recean, reacție privind intenția rușilor de a prelua controlul Aeroportului Chișinău: Instituțiile noastre sunt pregătite" (Recean, reaction against the Russians' intention to take over Chisinau Airport: our authorities are ready), Adevarul.ro, February 22, 2023, https://adevarul.ro/stiri-externe/republica-moldova/recean-rusia-preluare-aeroport-chisinau-zelenski-2244246.html.

[58] *Ibidem.*

Conclusion: The "Devil in the Details"

Over the past year Moldova has been flooded with Russian propaganda.[59] Such a wave of FIMIs has contributed to inflaming the frustration of citizens and provoking widespread protests. Given the increasingly unstable situation, the Sandu government boosted cooperation in the defence sector with the EU and NATO. Although these relations are restricted to political commitments and support in specific technical areas not related to lethal equipment, they have been heavily targeted by Russian disinformation reinforcing large-scale psychological operations. The information warfare particularly leveraged Moldova's 'constitutional neutrality' and fears of the country being suddenly dragged into the Ukrainian conflict because of European or NATO interferences. This logic has contributed to instil a pervasive sense of uncertainty in Moldovan society, now more polarized than ever. As stressed by President Sandu, "Russian propaganda managed to convince part of the population that neutrality means you don't have to invest in your defence."[60] Consequently, NATO and the EU now are facing a serious 'assistance paradox': On the one hand, their support is much needed to shore up Moldova's limited defence capabilities. On the other hand, information about enhanced military support could be easily manipulated to exacerbate tensions and plunge the country into "Kremlin-controlled chaos".[61] Measures like the EU-financed long-range radars or the NATO Professional Development Programme can improve the resilience of Chisinau, but the Ukrainian case demonstrates how efficient armed forces, well-equipped and trained according to modern standards, are essential to mitigate possible military interventions. Empirical findings also show that Russian disinformation seems able to weaponize the debate on EU assistance in the security domain only to a limited extent, while relations with NATO are perceived by the population as more controversial. Finally, the incoming CSDP mission establishing early-warning mechanisms and the NATO cyber threat laboratory, in combination with national bans on pro-Russian broadcastings (e.g., RT, Sputnik), are important measures in the fight against externally forged narratives. Nevertheless, the dissemination of fake news on Facebook and Telegram groups has proved difficult to control. Containing the online diffusion of manipulated information about NATO and EU security assistance thus requires a solid population-centric strategic communication to engage diffusely and directly with those communities most exposed to disinformation. As the electoral campaign for the 2024 Moldovan presidential vote gets closer, we should not forget that "strategic uses of social networks may have a redistributive effect on international power relations".[62] Surely, Russia will remember it.

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[59] Shannon Bond, "From TV to Telegram to TikTok, Moldova Is Being Flooded with Russian Propaganda," Houston Public Media Foundation, University of Houston, March 9, 3023, https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/npr/2023/03/09/1162045645/from-tv-to-telegram-to-tiktok-moldova-is-being-flooded-with-russian-propaganda/

[60] Preussen, "Russia is planning coup in Moldova."

[61] Galeotti, "Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages."

[62] Thomas Nissen, "The Weaponization Of Social Media," Royal Danish Defence College, 2015, available at https://research.fak.dk/esploro/outputs/991815694803741.

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At Odds with NATO: Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland

Mădălina Tiurbe

Abstract. In recent years, the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union (EU) has been a strategically significant and highly complicated region with persistent stability and security issues. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) involvement in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU will be examined in this paper, with an emphasis on the numerous initiatives to improve security and collaboration in this crucial area. Since the conclusion of the Cold War, NATO's presence and participation in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU have changed substantially. The NATO-Ukraine Annual National Programme and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme are two examples of NATO's initiatives to interact with countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood on security-related matters. Additionally, NATO's involvement in the Eastern Neighbourhood goes beyond joint military operations. The Alliance has been working harder to assist partner country defence sector reforms, advance democratic governance, and bolster the rule of law. Building resilient societies that can survive both internal and external forces require these efforts. The complexity and difficulties of NATO's engagement with Russia in the Eastern Neighbourhood are also covered in this essay. NATO-Russia ties have been strained as a result of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea, which has refocused attention on deterrent and defensive measures in the area. In conclusion, NATO's involvement in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU is essential for fostering peace and security in the area. NATO has significantly improved collaboration and resiliency among Eastern European nations by adjusting to the changing threat environment and growing its relationships. However, difficulties still exist, notably when trying to manage relations with Russia.

Keywords: NATO, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Eastern Neighbourhood

Introduction

The presence of NATO in Eastern Europe has been a topic of sustained discourse, characterized by a multifaceted interplay of geopolitical interests, historical legacies, and security imperatives. Originating in the aftermath of World War II as a collective defence pact, NATO initially directed its efforts towards safeguarding the security of its member states within the Euro-Atlantic realm. However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and NATO's subsequent expansion eastward, its sphere of influence encroached upon the traditional domain of Russia and the former Soviet bloc nations.[1] This extension engendered tensions and apprehensions between NATO and Russia, with the Kremlin perceiving it as a strategic transgression.[2] Consequently, NATO's involvement in Eastern Europe has frequently encountered opposition from Russia, resulting in a dynamic characterized by strategic rivalry, military displays, and diplomatic complexities. This introductory exposition lays the groundwork for a comprehensive examination of the intricate dynamics shaping NATO's

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[1] Julian Lindley-French, *The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The Enduring Alliance*, New York: Routledge, 2007, p. xii.

[2] Roland Dannreuther, "Russian Perceptions of the Atlantic Alliance," Politics Department Edinburgh University, Final Report for the NATO Fellowship 1995-1997, p. 4.

engagements with Eastern Europe, elucidating the inherent challenges and opportunities within the present convoluted geopolitical milieu.

NATO's Challenges Regarding Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland During the Ongoing Russia-Ukraine War

Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland have encountered disagreements with certain facets of NATO's policies and actions in recent years, notwithstanding their membership in the alliance. As former constituents of the Eastern bloc under Soviet sway, these nations possess distinct historical and geopolitical viewpoints that occasionally differ from NATO's unified stance. These frictions within NATO reveal the varied perspectives and interests among member states, mirroring the intricate geopolitical terrain of Eastern Europe. While these countries steadfastly uphold the alliance's overarching aims of collective defence and security, their nuanced positions underscore the complexities of sustaining unity within NATO amid evolving regional dynamics.

Challenges can impart advantageous effects for NATO across several dimensions. The necessity of addressing challenges compels NATO to undertake adaptation and evolution to confront emergent threats and dynamic geopolitical contexts. Through adept responses to challenges, NATO stands to fortify its resilience and adeptness in navigating intricate international dynamics. Moreover, challenges have the potential to cultivate augmented unity and cohesion among NATO member states as they collaboratively tackle mutual security imperatives. It is a common axiom that adversity often bolsters alliances by reinforcing shared values and objectives. Overall, whilst challenges may initially pose impediments, they possess the capacity to ultimately fortify NATO's capabilities, unity, and efficacy in advancing peace and security within a perpetually shifting global setting.

Amidst the Russia-Ukraine conflict unfolding on the European continent, the relevance of the NATO alliance has been accentuated to an unprecedented degree in the area: "The war in Ukraine has reset the strategic and geopolitical context of NATO, Europe and the wider world,"[3] in the words of General Philippe Lavigne, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation. Following months of steadfast support for Ukraine in its confrontation with Russia's forceful incursion, a discernible realignment was evident: the traditional focus of NATO's influence, once predominantly anchored in Paris and Berlin, has now undergone a significant eastward shift, extending from Helsinki to the Black Sea.[4] Eastern European nations, notably Poland, Romania, Finland, and the Baltic states, possess a heightened awareness of the threat emanating from Russia, a sentiment less keenly felt by their Western counterparts.[5] Russia stands as the foremost and most immediate threat to the security and peace of NATO allies. Consequently, NATO has augmented its military presence in the East,

[3] NATO, "NATO Resilience Symposium 2022 Report," May 4-6, 2022/Warsaw, Poland, p. 2, https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/20221018_resilience_symposium_report-1.pdf.
[4] Mike Rogers, "NATO's Got a New Backbone," *Foreign Policy*, May 12, 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/12/ukraine-russia-nato-united-states-poland-war-military-spending-alliance/.
[5] *Ibidem.*

a direct response to Russia's belligerent conduct, which epitomizes a recurrent pattern of aggressive actions targeting its neighbouring states.

The Case of Hungary

To commence, we shall address Romania's neighbouring nation, Hungary. An array of analyses concerning Hungary, under titles such as "Hungary Frustrates NATO,"[6] or inquiries pondering its reliability as a NATO member, abound. The conduct of Hungary evokes concern not only within the confines of NATO but also within the European Union. Presently, Hungary stands as the EU member state bearing the closest resemblance to an autocracy.[7] The inquiry naturally arises: what factors contribute to this state of affairs? Certainly, if we were to personify this phenomenon, Viktor Orbán would emerge as its embodiment. A thorough examination of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's governance reveals a Hungary increasingly shaped into a political apparatus under the singular leadership of one individual. Orbán adeptly combines elements of soft Euroscepticism with a stance grounded in national conservatism. Moreover, Orbán has progressively positioned himself as a significant influence, advocating for the interests of Beijing and Moscow within the European Union's corridors of power.

Since the onset of Russia's military incursion into Ukraine on 24 February 2022 – a heightening of hostilities in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict which commenced in 2014, Orbán's leadership has been characterized by a series of actions that have drawn significant attention. These include obstructing the transit of Western weaponry intended for Ukraine with seminal statements such as: "Giving a new momentum to weapon deliveries is completely unacceptable for Hungary. Hungary has never delivered weapons and has no intention to do so in the future. We are not willing to participate in any kind of decisions that contributes to the increase of arms shipments,"[8] as Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó emphasized. Advocating for exceptions to European Union sanctions to facilitate the continued flow of Russian gas and oil into Hungary is another pillar: "An agreement was reached. Hungary is exempt from the oil embargo!"[9]

The European Union approved the request as to reach consensus on the approval of new sanctions, subsequently eliciting further requests for extensions. Hungary impeded the disbursement of EU financial assistance designated for Ukraine, initially vetoing the 50-billion-euro aid package in December 2023. However, approval was granted in February 2024, leading EU officials to tout it as a conspicuous demonstration of unity among all 27 member states. Widely criticized as a quid pro quo arrangement, Hungary received in return acknowledgment from the Commission regarding the alignment of its judicial reforms with the core principle of judicial independence, this action resulting in the unblocking of European Union's funds

[6] Lily Bayer, "Annoying Sideshow: Hungary Frustrates NATO Allies," Politico, April 12, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-nato-sweden-bid-accession-block-democracy-viktor-orban/.

[7] Attila Ágh, *Perfect Autocracy in Hungary*, Budapest: Corvinus University of Budapest, 2021, p. 17.

[8] Permanent Representation of Hungary to the European Union, "Hungary Refused to Bear Any Financial Burdens of Ukraine Weapons Deliveries," https://eu-brusszel.mfa.gov.hu/eng/page/hungary-refuses-to-bear-any-financial-burdens-of-ukraine-weapons-deliveries, accessed October 24, 2023.

[9] David M. Herszenhorn, Jacopo Barigazz and Barbara Moens, "After Orbán Pipes up, Hungary Skips Russian Oil Ban," Politico, May 31, 2022, https://www.politico.eu/article/orban-hungary-eu-oil-ban-exempt-euco/.

allocated to the nation. Budapest has additionally advocated for a cessation of hostilities along the existing front lines for Ukraine, proposing a ceasefire as a precursor to negotiations aimed at curbing the loss of human lives and financial expenditure.

Viktor Orbán is frequently depicted as a revisionist figure within contemporary political discourse. Serving as Prime Minister of Hungary since 2010 (with a previous holding of the office in 1998 to 2002), Orbán has embarked upon a course of policy initiatives aimed at contesting entrenched norms and institutional frameworks, with the aim of reconfiguring Hungary's political and cultural milieu in accordance with his vision of national conservatism. His stance is encapsulated in his assertion that "We do not support Ukraine in any issue in the international scene until it restores the laws that guarantee the rights of Hungarians."[10] He asserted his commitment to safeguarding the interests of Hungarians in Transcarpathia, contending that Ukrainian authorities have long suppressed Hungarian educational institutions with the intention of assimilating them into the Ukrainian educational system.

Following protracted delays, Hungarian legislators ultimately ratified Finland's accession to NATO, shortly preceding Turkey's endorsement. However, Hungary persists in deferring a decision regarding Sweden's accession, despite Turkey's recent ratification. Orbán additionally conveyed that Hungary harbours no urgency in ratifying Sweden's NATO accession, signalling a further postponement in a process that has remained hindered in parliament as Budapest has cited what it perceives as unwarranted accusations by Swedish politicians, which it claims have undermined democratic norms and rights.[11] Hungary is the last country to hold off Sweden's accession to the world's largest military alliance and on February 6 this year, the ruling Fidesz Party boycotted the parliamentary session which could have casted the approval of the Nordic country to NATO, resulting in additional postponements.

NATO ambassadors convened in Budapest amidst escalating concerns regarding Hungary's relationship with Russia, particularly in the aftermath of discussions between Orbán and Putin in 2023. David Pressman, the U.S. Ambassador to Hungary, articulated diplomatic unease over the interactions between Russia and Hungary, a NATO and EU member state, citing significant security apprehensions: "We have concerns about the continued eagerness of Hungarian leaders to expand and deepen ties with the Russian Federation despite Russia's ongoing brutal aggression against Ukraine and threat to transatlantic security."[12] Notably, Orbán's meeting with Putin marked him as the first leader of an EU nation to engage with the Russian president subsequent to the issuance of an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court, implicating Putin in a war crime pertaining to the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian

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[10] Boldizsar Gyori and Krisztina Than, "Hungary PM Criticizes Ukraine, Says No Rush to Ratify Sweden's NATO Bid," Reuters, September 25, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-pm-criticizes-ukraine-says-no-rush-ratify-swedens-nato-bid-2023-09-25/.

[11] *Ibidem.*

[12] Embassy of the United States of America, "Ambassador David Pressman's Remarks at a Press Conference Announcing Sanctions Designations," Budapest, April 12, 2023, https://hu.usembassy.gov/news-ambassador-pressmans-remarks-at-a-press-conference-announcing-sanctions-designations/.

children to Russia.[13] The confluence of these developments indeed warrants concern. Within NATO, the present juncture appears opportune for Washington to intensify its diplomatic pressure on Budapest. A concerted effort by the United States and the European Union holds the potential to exert influence over Orbán's administration and mitigate its alignment with Russian interests.

The Slovakian U-turn Regarding NATO

Subsequently, it is imperative to delve into the case of Slovakia. Prime Minister Fico emphatically asserted, "You'll hear a sovereign Slovak voice from Slovak ministries and watch a sovereign Slovak foreign policy."[14] Slovakia has consistently demonstrated robust support for its neighbour, Ukraine. Diplomatically, it has stood by Kyiv's side in forums such as the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO. Notably, Slovakia emerged as one of the earliest contributors of military assistance to Ukraine. Furthermore, Slovakia has supplied Ukraine with a variety of military assets: ammunition, surface-to-air missiles, and helicopters, has transferred its entire fleet of retired MiG-29 fighters, provided the sole S-300 air defence system in its possession.[15]

In the parliamentary elections, Robert Fico and his leftist-populist party secured 23% of the vote, advocating a platform that explicitly pledged against sending any ammunition to Ukraine in the event of their ascension to government. This commitment aligns with Fico's broader campaign narrative, which has espoused pro-Russian sentiments. There is substantial apprehension that Fico's return to power, following his ousting five years prior due to his connection to the murder of a journalist,[16] may serve to undermine cohesion within both the European Union and NATO. Furthermore, concerns abound that Fico's electoral victory could potentially embolden Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his political agenda.

Based on his rhetoric, Fico may endeavour, aided by his foreign minister, who notably suggested Ukrainian responsibility for the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, to obstruct Western backing for Ukraine or the imposition of sanctions against Russia. Alongside renouncing arms supplies to Ukraine, Fico has pledged to do everything to initiate peace negotiations aimed at resolving the conflict; moreover, he opposes EU sanctions targeting both Russia and Ukraine, as well as Ukraine' prospective accession to NATO and, Fico has adopted a stance attributing equal culpability to both the political West and Ukraine for instigating the conflict.[17]

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[13] Zoltan Simon, "Orban Is First EU Leader to Meet Putin Since Arrest Warrant," *Bloomberg*, September 17, 2023, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-17/orban-becomes-first-eu-leader-to-meet-putin-since-arrest-warrant.

[14] Tim Gosling, "Slovakia: Is populist PM Robert Fico a threat to EU, NATO?," Deutsche Welle, March 11, 2023, https://www.dw.com/en/slovakia-is-populist-pm-robert-fico-a-threat-to-eu-nato/a-67286921.

[15] Ted Snider, "Slovakia May Join Two Other NATO Countries at Odds with Zelensky," Responsible Statecraft, October 3, 2023, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/slovakia-robert-fico-ukraine/#:~:text=Moreover%2C%20Slovakia%20has%20sent%20Ukraine,air%20defence%20system%20they%20had.

[16] Andrej Skolkay, "What Does the Murder of a Journalist, and Follow-up Events, Tell Us about Freedom of the Press and Politics in a European Country?," Central European Journal of Communication, 32.

[17] Snider, *art. cit.*

Sensibly, with a modest population of merely 5.5 million and an economy heavily reliant on EU partners, Slovakia lacks the capacity to significantly influence Western policy. Shortly after assuming office, the newly appointed leader conveyed to European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen Slovakia's stance of refraining from supplying weapons to Ukraine and opposing the imposition of fresh sanctions against Russia. This position resonates with a considerable segment of the Slovak population, who historically maintain a more favourable disposition towards Russia compared to their counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe.[18] Yet, doubts linger regarding the reliability of the Fico government. It is widely perceived that Fico adopts a pragmatic approach, cognizant of the indispensable role of EU funding in ensuring Slovakia's stability. This sentiment is underscored by the freezing of substantial EU funds to Poland and Hungary due to similar concerns. Fico's assertion that Slovakia will cease sending any further armaments to Ukraine is largely regarded as an idle threat, given that the country has already dispatched virtually all available weaponry, in addition to Slovakia's privately-owned arms industry, which enjoys significant contracts from Western nations, notably Germany, for the production and delivery of armaments to Ukraine, which appears poised to continue its operations across the Eastern border.[19]

However, the onset of 2024 witnessed a series of impassioned declarations by Fico, notably expressing again his intent to exercise a veto against Ukraine's accession to NATO, a prospect to which he holds opposition. Additionally, he articulated the perspective that the resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict necessitates Ukraine's concession of certain territories as a compromise: "What do they expect, that the Russians will leave Crimea, Donbas, and Luhansk? That's unrealistic."[20] He characterized Ukraine as lacking independence, sovereignty, and identified it as one of the most corrupt nations globally, citing instances of corruption pertaining to the aid allocated to Ukraine amid the conflict.[21] However, in a significant reversal of policy, a few days later, on January 24, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal convened with his Slovak counterpart, Robert Fico, in the western Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod. This meeting prompted Shmyhal to announce that an agreement had been reached on multiple vital subjects: the facilitation of Ukraine's direct procurement of weaponry and equipment from Slovak companies without governmental intervention, additionally to an indication of support from Bratislava for the Ukraine Facility programme, envisaging the allocation of 50-billion-euros by the European Union for Ukraine.[22]

Poland's Case Regarding NATO and the Spill-Over of Farmers' Resentment Over Ukraine's Support

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[18] Gosling, *art. cit*.
[19] *Ibidem.*
[20] Mathieu Pollet, "Slovak PM: Ukraine must give up territory to end Russian invasion," Politico, January 21, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/slovakia-prime-minister-robert-fico-ukraine-cede-territory-russia-moscow-invasion-nato-entry/.
[21] Euractiv, "Slovak PM Claims Ukraine Is Not a Sovereign Country," October 21, 2023, https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/slovak-pm-says-ukraine-is-not-a-sovereign-country/.
[22] Radio Free Europe, "Ukrainian And Slovak PMs Agree To 'New Pragmatism' To Aid Strained Relations," January 24, 2024, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-slovakia-shmyhal-meeting-pragmatism-relations-aid/32790125.html.

In contrast, Poland has emerged as arguably the most ardent advocate for Ukraine. Demonstrating its commitment, Poland has provided Ukraine with approximately one-third of its own arsenal, amounting to around $4 billion, and has served as the primary conduit for the transit of weaponry from other NATO member states into Ukraine.[23] Moreover, Poland has fervently championed Ukraine's appeals for access to advanced weaponry and for its inclusion within NATO. However, tensions arising from a disagreement over the export of Ukrainian grain have underscored the vulnerability inherent in this partnership.

An exemplary illustration of commitment to addressing the challenges posed by Russia is found in Poland, a nation with a population of merely 37 million, representing almost half the size of its ally Germany. Despite its comparatively modest demographic scale, Poland is poised to significantly augment the size of its armed forces, with plans to expand its military to 300.000 troops, thereby establishing itself as the largest force in Europe by a considerable margin.[24] While numerical superiority is not the sole determinant of military prowess, Poland and the Baltic nations stand out as among the few NATO member states consistently fulfilling the commitments outlined in the 2006 agreement, which stipulated that all alliance members allocate a minimum of 2 percent of their GDP towards defence expenditure, with 20 percent of this budget earmarked for investment in major equipment to bolster NATO's military preparedness.

In a proactive demonstration of its dedication, the Polish government enacted legislation mandating that the nation allocate 3 percent of its GDP towards defence spending. Furthermore, recent initiatives have been introduced with the intention of allocating over 4 percent of GDP to defence expenditure, surpassing the relative contributions of all other NATO member states, including prominent actors such as Canada and Germany. The Polish Defence Minister has reaffirmed this strategic approach, emphasizing the imperative to accelerate the modernization of military equipment in response to the egregious assault perpetrated by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, coupled with the capricious nature of Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions.

In another turn, the Polish parliament has ratified a resolution that acknowledges the culpability of Ukraine for the Volhynian massacre: a series of anti-Polish ethnic cleansing operations perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists in German-occupied Poland during the summer of 1943.[25] As per the terms of the resolution, the process of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation, which has been diligently fostered by representatives of both nations over the years, necessitates an acknowledgment of guilt and the commemoration of the victims of World War II.

However, it is the recent dispute over grain that poses a significant threat to this delicate relationship. Ukraine has accused Poland of betrayal, asserting that restrictions imposed on the import of Ukrainian grain serve to safeguard Polish farmers and markets at the expense of

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[23] Priyanka Shankar and Jessie Wingard, "Why Is Poland No Longer Sending Arms to Ukraine?," Deutsche Welle, September 22, 2023, https://www.dw.com/en/why-is-poland-no-longer-sending-arms-to-ukraine/a-66889180.

[24] Paul Jones, "Poland Becomes a Defence Colossus," Centre for European Policy Analysis*,* September 28, 2023, https://cepa.org/article/poland-becomes-a-defence-colossus/.

[25] European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, "Volhynian Massacre," August 21, 2013, https://enrs.eu/news/volhynian-massacre.

Ukrainian interests. In response, Poland has rebuked Ukraine's stance, urged a greater display of gratitude, and underscored the pivotal role that Poland has played in supporting Ukraine over recent months and years. Although Poland has ceased the transfer of weapons to Ukraine, citing a focus on bolstering its own arsenal with more contemporary weaponry, existing arms agreements with Ukraine will be honoured, and Poland will facilitate the transit of arms from other countries through its territory to Ukraine.

Of the three nations against which Ukraine has filed a complaint with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Poland has aligned with Hungary and Slovakia, thereby exacerbating the division within NATO. This development is disconcerting as Poland, a member of NATO, had hitherto been regarded as one of Ukraine's staunchest allies in its conflict with Russia. However, recent events have contributed to a deterioration in relations between the two nations.

The protests by Polish farmers reflected a complex interplay of economic and geopolitical concerns. These demonstrations were emblematic of the challenges faced by Polish agricultural communities, particularly in relation to competition from Ukrainian agricultural products. Polish farmers expressed grievances over what they perceived as unfair competition from Ukrainian counterparts, citing differences in production costs, labour standards, and environmental regulations. They argued that these disparities placed them at a competitive disadvantage and undermined the viability of their livelihoods. The protests underscored broader tensions between Poland and Ukraine, rooted in historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors. Some Polish farmers viewed Ukraine's agricultural expansion as encroaching upon Poland's agricultural market, exacerbating existing economic pressures. At the heart of the protests were calls for government intervention to safeguard the interests of Polish farmers and ensure a level playing field in the agricultural sector. Demonstrators demanded policies that address issues such as import regulations, market access, and fair-trade practices.

In recent months, farmers throughout Europe have embarked upon organised demonstrations, articulating apprehensions pertaining to diverse factors encroaching upon their livelihoods. Continent-wide blockades have emerged, transcending the national borders of Poland from Portugal to Belgium, France, Germany, Romania, Greece, and beyond. The escalation of farmer grievances correlates with heightened input costs precipitated by the Ukrainian conflict, exacerbating transportation and fertilization expenses. Moreover, the unimpeded influx of competitively priced agricultural goods from Ukraine, facilitated by the EU's relaxation of quotas and duties in response to Russia's incursion, has directly impinged upon domestic agricultural sectors, fomenting resentment, and cries of unfair competition. In France, this confluence of factors has engendered an augmented sense of indignation towards other nations implicated in the importation of inexpensive produce. These demonstrations have resonated at the supranational level, prompting the European Commission to proffer measures aimed at curbing agricultural imports from Ukraine.[26]

[26] European Commission, "Following the Expiry of the Restrictive Measures on Ukrainian Exports of Grain and Other Foodstuff to the EU, Ukraine Agrees to Introduce Measures to Avoid a Renewed Surge in EU Imports," September 15, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_4497.

Unity, Divisions, and Solutions

In conclusion, the challenge posed by opposition from Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland within the NATO framework regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict necessitates a nuanced and diplomatic approach. Despite the unity espoused within the Alliance, the divergent geopolitical considerations and historical ties of these Central European nations render consensus on matters pertaining to Russia and Ukraine elusive.

Addressing this challenge requires a multifaceted strategy that acknowledges the unique concerns of each dissenting member state while upholding the core principles of NATO solidarity and collective defence. Engagement through diplomatic channels, bolstered by sustained dialogue and negotiation, offers a pathway towards fostering greater alignment of interests and objectives. Moreover, efforts to enhance the security and resilience of these nations against potential Russian aggression should be prioritized, thereby assuaging their apprehensions, and bolstering their commitment to the Alliance.

Importantly, NATO must uphold its commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, sending a clear message of deterrence to Russia while simultaneously offering diplomatic avenues for de-escalation and conflict resolution. Moreover, leveraging multilateral platforms such as the European Union can complement NATO's efforts by providing additional avenues for dialogue and cooperation with dissenting member states.

In navigating the complexities of opposition within its ranks, NATO must demonstrate flexibility, pragmatism, and strategic foresight. By fostering dialogue, addressing legitimate concerns, and reinforcing the collective defence posture of the Alliance, NATO can navigate the challenges posed by dissenting member states and emerge as a steadfast bulwark against external threats, including the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

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Renewable Energy in Poland in the Face of New EU Challenges With Particular Emphasis on the Heating Sector

Magdalena Tomala

Abstract. The aim of the study is to analyse the adaptation of the Polish renewable energy sector to the requirements of the EU climate and energy policy, including the pursuit of climate neutrality by 2050. The work consists of two parts. In the first of them, the Polish energy strategy was compared to the EU's objectives. Next, the balance of renewable energy Polish was compared to EU countries according to the heating sector, which plays a key role in achieving the EU's objectives of Green Deal.

Keywords: renewable energy, Green Deal, Poland, climate neutrality

Introduction

Ralf Fücks argues that Europe's future lies in leading the global green industrial revolution.[1] For him, success in renewable energy will define Europe's prosperity and global standing. Nations cannot ignore the link between renewables, energy security, and achieving sustainable development targets. Consequently, renewable energy development must be each country priority.[2] Recognizing this, Poland aligns with the EU's climate policy, demonstrated by its "Energy Policy of Poland until 2040" (approved Feb. 2, 2021)[3] This document outlines objectives that promote national energy security, economic competitiveness, energy efficiency, and environmental protection.[4] To ensure success, Poland must carefully coordinate its energy policy with the EU's broader goals.

The issue of renewable energy is widely discussed in the literature. The problem is mainly dealt with earth science researchers, who analyse new technologies and possibilities for improving the efficiency of energy production facilities. They consider the various possibilities

[1] Ralf Fücks, *Zielona rewolucja* (Green Revolution), Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2016, p. 23.

[2] Komisja Europejska, Komunikat Komisji do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady, Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów. „Gotowi na 55": osiągnięcie unijnego celu klimatycznego na 2030 r. w drodze do neutralności klimatycznej, No COM (2021)550 final, 2021 (European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. 'Ready for 55': achieving the EU's 2030 climate target on the way to climate neutrality, No COM (2021)550 final, 2021).

[3] Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska (Ministry of Climate and Environment), *Energy Policy of Poland until 2040 (PEP2040)*, No. 264, 2021.

[4] The document replaced the strategy, which was to operate until 2030. See Ministerstwo Gospodarki, *Polityka Energetyczna Polski Do 2030 Roku* (Warszawa, 10 November 2009). (Ministry of Economy, Poland's Energy Policy Until 2030 (Warsaw, 10 November 2009). See also: Rada Ministrów, "Bezpieczeństwo Energetyczne i Środowisko - perspektywa do 2020 r." (The Council of Ministers, Energy Security and Environment - perspective until 2020), https://sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/mp-monitor-polski/przyjecie-strategii-bezpieczenstwo-energetyczne-i-srodowisko-18103708, accessed December 23, 2023.

of energy production, including wind,[5] solar,[6] geothermal,[7] among others. It should be noted that at the beginning of the 21st century, it is time when most renewable energy technologies have developed significantly.[8] This is due to an increase in the quality, efficiency of renewable energy generation, as well as a decrease in their production costs.[9] Energy storage remains a major challenge for earth scientists. It is a critical factor in maintaining a reliable and modern electricity system.[10] It enables the storage of electricity, generated from variable renewable energy sources such as solar and wind. In the article *Overview of energy storage in renewable energy systems*, the authors focus on hydrogen, batteries and energy storage used in systems such as photovoltaic and wind power plants. The paper also considers the economic aspects of different storage technologies.[11]

From the perspective of the social sciences, researchers are primarily interested in issues relating to the security of countries energy supply.[12] They analyse, for example, the determinants of national energy policies, interdependence and the opportunities and challenges at the beginning of the 21st century.[13] It is also worth noting that studies deal with Polish energy policy. This issue is widely discussed in the literature[14] but little space has been devoted to the renewable energy. Magdalena Zajączkowska analyses the share of renewable energy in energy production and consumption in Poland and discusses the legal aspects related to the Act of 20 February 2015 on renewable energy sources, including the principles and conditions for supporting its production (i.e. supporting the development of prosumer power generation).[15] However, it should be noted that the article was published before the change in energy policy

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[5] Vaughn Nelson, Kenneth L. Starcher, *Wind Energy. Renewable Energy and the Environment*, London: Routledge, 2019.

[6] Robert Foster, Majid Ghassemi, Alma Cota, *Solar Energy: Renewable Energy and the Environment*, Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2010.

[7] William E. Glassley, *Geothermal Energy: Renewable Energy and the Environment. Energy and the Environment*, 2nd ed., Boca Raton: CRC Press/Taylor & Francis, 2015.

[8] John Twidell, Tony Weir, *Renewable Energy Resources*, London: Routledge, 2015.

[9] Robert Gross, Matthew Leach, Ausilio Bauen, "Progress in Renewable Energy," in *Environment International* vol. 29, no. 1/April 2003, pp. 105–22, https://doi.org/10.1016/s0160-4120(02)00130-7.

[10] S. Ould Amrouche, Djamila Rekioua, Toufik Rekioua, and Seddik Bacha, "Overview of Energy Storage in Renewable Energy Systems," in *International Journal of Hydrogen Energy* vol. 41, no. 45/December 2016, pp. 20914–27, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhydene.2016.06.243.

[11] *Ibidem*.

[12] Roland Dannreuther, *Energy Security*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017; Tomasz Młynarski, *Bezpieczeństwo energetyczne w pierwszej dekadzie XXI wieku: mozaika interesów i geostrategii* (Energy security in the first decade of the 21st century: a mosaic of interests and geostrategies), Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2011; Sascha Muller-Kraenner, *Energy Security*, 1st ed., London: Routledge, 2018.

[13] Erhard Cziomer, *Międzynarodowe Bezpieczeństwo Energetyczne w XXI Wieku* (International Energy Security in the 21st Century), Kraków: Krakowskie Towarzystwo Edukacyjne - Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, 2008; Ewelina Kochanek, *Geopolityka Energetyczna* (Energy Geopolitics), Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Humanistycznego US "Minerwa", 2016.

[14] Maciej Chorowski, "Transformacja Polskiego Systemu Elektroenergetycznego i Szczególna Rola Ciepłownictwa i Kogeneracji w Tym Procesie" (Transformation of the Polish Power System and the Special Role of District Heating and Cogeneration in this Process), *Energetyka Rozproszona* (Distributed Energy), vol. 5–6/2021, pp. 15–20; Anna Czech, "Efektywność i Bezpieczeństwo Energetyczne Polski w Świetle Wybranych Wskaźników Ekonomicznych" (Poland's Energy Efficiency and Security in the Light of Selected Economic Indicators), Inteligentne Organizacje (Intelligent Organisations), 2020, pp. 11–25.

[15] Magdalena Zajączkowska, "Odnawialne Źródła Energii a Bezpieczeństwo Energetyczne Polski. Wybrane Aspekty" (Renewable Energy Sources and Poland's Energy Security. Selected Aspects), *Horyzonty Polityki* (Political Horizons), vol. 11, no. 37/2020, p. 161.

that took place at the beginning of 2021. Therefore, there is no study in the literature that refers to the currently binding Energy Strategy of Poland.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the adaptation of the Polish renewable energy sector to the requirements of the EU climate and energy policy, including the pursuit of climate neutrality by 2050. Taking into account Poland's economic interest, its participation in the shaping of the EU energy and environmental policy and the need to ensure energy security, it can be hypothesised that Poland's goal should be diversification its energy sources, including an increased commitment to renewable energy opportunities.

The paper consists of two parts. The first part compares Poland's Energy Strategy to the needs, resulting from EU targets. The second part analyses the heating sector, which plays an extremely important role for Polish society. The paper highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the renewable energy market and its practical functioning in Poland.

Comparison of EU and Polish Renewable Energy Targets

Renewable energy is an alternative to traditional energy sources, i.e. fossil fuels. It can be defined as energy generated from the Earth's natural resources. It is important to note that energy derived from natural and recurring natural processes and does not produce any net greenhouse gas emissions, hence it is often referred to as clean energy. The Polish Energy Law defines renewable energy sources as "a source which, in the process of conversion, uses wind energy, solar energy, aerothermal energy, geothermal energy, hydrothermal energy, hydroelectric energy, wave, current and tidal energy, energy obtained from biomass, biogas, agricultural biogas and bioliquids".[16] This is energy that uses naturally occurring processes without compromising the Earth's resources.

Nature provides great opportunities with derive energy from non-renewable or renewable resources to mankind. It is up to the representatives of national governments to decide between these energy options. This decision has now, but will also have in the future, an important impact on the lives of citizens, not only in terms of economics and international security, but also in terms of health and nature. On the one hand, we can speak of problems on the labour market in the mining sector or energy security, which the state provides to citizens at the cost of environmental pollution, loss of health, increase in toxic emissions into the atmosphere. These factors may be considered in the short term, but the prudence of those in power should also take into account the long-term consequences of actions taken. The question may be posed as to what direction Poland is heading in? Does it take into account the goals and objectives of the EU until 2030 and 2050 in its policy?

Poland's actions to date compared to the EU average in terms of the share of renewable energy in total energy consumption are presented in Figure 1.

[16] Marszalek Sejmu, *Ustawa z Dnia 20 Lutego* 2015 r. o Odnawialnych Źródłach Energii (Act of February 20, 2015 on Renewable Energy Sources), 2020, p. 7.

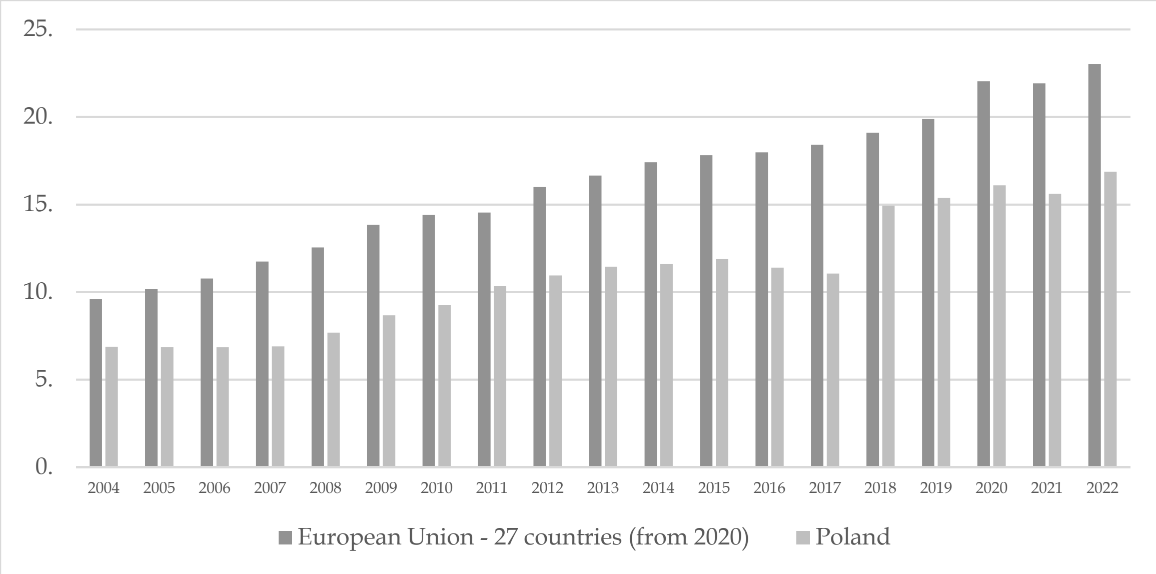


Figure 1. Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption
Source: Eurostat, Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nrg_ind_ren__custom_10121177/default/table?lang=en, [2 January 2024]

As can be seen in the figure above, both Poland and the EU have achieved their targets by 2020. The indicator for the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption shows the progress towards achieving the Europe 2020 target. For the EU average, the upward trend continued over the period under review, with countries increasing the percentage share of energy in final consumption by around 0.6% on average. In Poland, the average growth rate of the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption was only 0.3%. It is also noteworthy that the trend in Poland changed from increasing to decreasing between 2016 and 2018, which demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the measures taken during this period. Poland compares unfavourably with other EU countries. Most of them managed not only to meet their renewable energy targets, but to increase them. The leaders who have bet on renewable energy include the Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark) and Latvia. The worst performers in this area, along with Malta, the Netherlands and Belgium.[17]

The most important factor in the disappointed progress to meet renewable energy targets was the global economic crisis in 2008-2010.[18] It is also possible to point to the ineffectiveness of some countries in this regard, as the crisis did not prevent many actors from achieving their intended priorities, or even from setting additional, one might say 'excess', targets in this regard.

It is therefore worth examining the objectives that the EU and its Member States have set themselves. As early as 2007, the Communication from the European Commission entitled The Renewable Energy Roadmap recognised that a target of 20% of renewable energy in total energy consumption and a 10% share of renewable energy in transport were appropriate and

[17] Ministerstwo Gospodarki, *op. cit.*
[18] Mariola Zalewska, Piotr Świetlikowski. "Opportunities to Achieve Main Goals of Europe 2020 Strategy by V4 Countries," in *Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organisation and Management Series*, no. 104/2017, pp. 367–78, https://doi.org/10.29119/1641-3466.2017.104.27.

achievable targets by 2020.[19] At that time, an obligation was placed on each Member State to adopt a renewable energy action plan, taking into account its impact on final energy consumption.

In 2009. Poland's Ministry of Economy set specific targets for renewable energy:[20]

- to increase the share of renewable energy sources in final energy consumption to at least 15% in 2020, and to increase this figure further in subsequent years,
- achieving a 10% share of biofuels in the transport fuel market in 2020 and increasing the use of 2nd generation biofuels,
- protection of forests from overexploitation in order to obtain biomass, and sustainable use of agricultural areas for RES, including biofuels, so as not to lead to competition between renewable energy and agriculture, and to preserve biodiversity
- use of existing damming facilities owned by the State Treasury for electricity generation.
- increase the degree of diversification of supply sources and create optimal conditions for the development of dispersed energy based on locally available raw materials

The following table presents data on how the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption in 2004 compares to the EU countries' indicated 2020 targets and to the assumed progression that the countries intended to make over the period under review (see Figure 2).

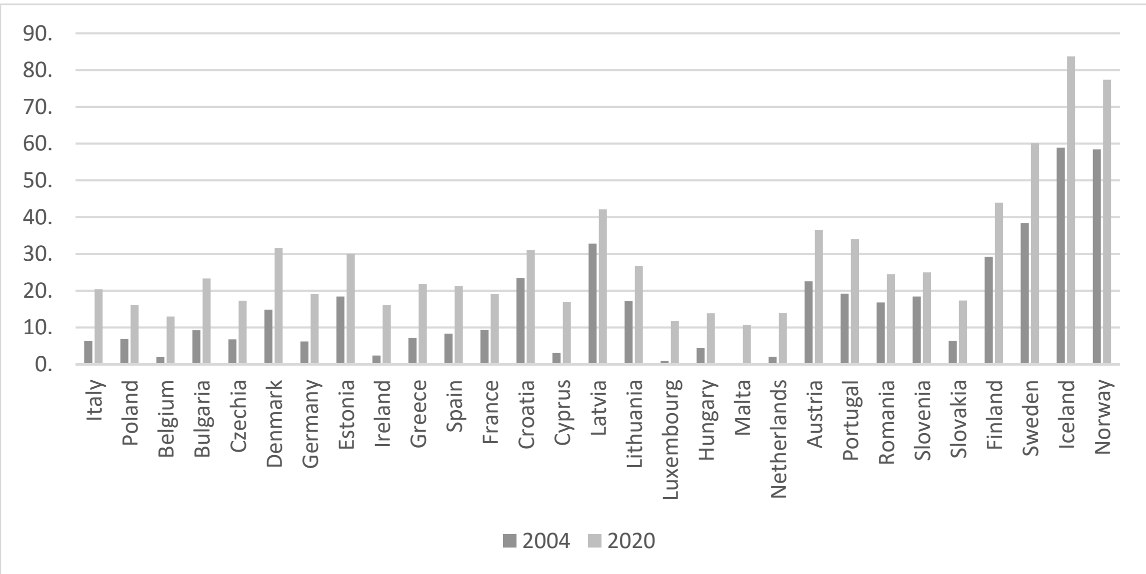


Figure 2. Comparison of the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption from 2005 to 2020
Source: Eurostat, Share of energy from renewable sources https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nrg_ind_ren__custom_10121177/default/table?lang=en

[19] European Commission, "Mapa Drogowa na Rzecz Energii Odnawialnej" (Renewable Energy Roadmap), January 10, 2007, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:l27065.
[20] Ministerstwo Gospodarki, *op. cit.,* p. 19.

As shown in Fig. 2, in 2004. Poland did not belong to the group of countries whose share of renewable energy in final energy consumption was the lowest. The indicator value of 6.88% in 2004 placed it close to the median, which divided the EU countries into two groups. The leader at the time was Sweden (38.43%). Poland set itself much less ambitious renewable energy targets than it could have done. Poland designed to achieve 15% while countries, which had similar result of renewable energy in 2004 such as France (23%), Spain (20%), Bulgaria (16%), Germany (18%) set more ambitious goals. Firstly, Poland dropped from the medium group to the lowest - i.e. it was among the quarter of countries with the least ambitious targets to be achieved in 2020 (see tab. 1 and fig. 2)

Table 1. European countries goals according to renewable energy

Country	Goal for 2020
Belgium	13
Bulgaria	16
Czech	13
Denmark	30
Germany	18
Estonia	25
Ireland	16
Greece	18
Spain	20
France	23
Croatia	20
Italy	17
Cyprus	13
Latvia	40
Lithuania	23
Luxemburg	11
Hungary	13
Malta	10
Nederland	14
Austria	34
Poland	15
Portugal	31
Romania	24
Slovenia	25
Slovakia	14
Finlandia	38
Sweden	49

Source: Ministerstwo Gospodarki, *Polityka energetyczna Polski do 2030 roku*, No 202, 2009.

The leaders were Sweden, Latvia, Finland, whose ambition was not only to reach the size of the EU average energy share. The countries indicated had set themselves targets about twice as high. It is important to note that the EU countries recognise the climate threat and have therefore not stopped their efforts on renewable energy, but have adopted new, more ambitious targets in the area of renewable energy in 2019, which present a common position. An expression of their aspirations is a document called the Green Deal, which takes into account the need to transform the economies of European countries in order to build a new economic model.

In the document, the European Commission proposed to increase the target for the share of renewable energy in the energy mix to 40% and to reduce final and primary energy consumption by 36-39%. The Commission has set up a new Social Climate Fund to support EU citizens most affected by energy or mobility poverty. It has been allocated €72.2 billion, which will be used over a seven-year period for projects related to building renovation, access to zero-carbon and low-carbon mobility. In the area of transport, the European Commission has also proposed ambitious targets to reduce carbon emissions, including.[21]

- a 55% reduction in emissions from passenger cars by 2030.
- a 50% reduction in emissions from vans by 2030.
- zero emissions from new passenger cars by 2035.

The Commission has highlighted the need to develop the market for zero- and low-emission vehicles, including the infrastructure needed to charge vehicles for both short and long journeys. This is important because, from 2026, road transport will be included in the Emissions Trading Scheme, which will impose charges if it pollutes.[22]

It should be noted that the EU has set itself a much higher target of doubling the share of renewable energy in its final energy consumption. In the case of the EU, Poland therefore has an increase in the dynamics of its activity in this area. The question may be posed as to how Poland responds to the EU's energy challenges.

The authorities have announced an increase in the share of RES in all sectors and technologies in 2030 to 23%, including: no less than 32% in the power sector (mainly wind and PV), 28% in the heating sector (increase by 1.1 pp y/y), 14% in transport (with a large contribution from electromobility). In terms of offshore wind power, installed capacity will reach about 5.9 GW in 2030 and up to about 11 GW in 2040, according to the plan. In addition, the Strategy plans an increase in photovoltaic capacity of about 5-7 GW in 2030 and about 10-16 GW in 2040.[23]

In conclusion, it can be pointed out that Polish aspirations in the field of renewable energy are very weak. The aspirations of the EU countries have on average doubled in the 2030 and 2040 perspective. At the same time, Poland declared an increase in expenditures on equipment producing renewable energy to a level of (23%), which is only slightly higher than

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[21] European Commission, "Realizacja Europejskiego Zielonego Ładu" (Implementing the European Green Deal), https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_pl, accessed January 2, 2022.
[22] *Ibidem.*
[23] Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 10.

the declared 20% for the EU average in 2020. It should be emphasised that the renewable energy sector plays a very important and even strategic role in building the EU green deal. It acquires strategic importance in the perspective of Poland's energy security and independence from other countries, including such an unreliable partner in the international arena as Russia. Expenditure incurred on increasing production capacity should be looked at from a broader perspective. Poland should not focus solely on the financial outlay incurred and on energy security here and now. It should also include in its strategy the future profits resulting from energy production. This is the easiest and most effective action it can take to precisely ensure its energy independence. The war in Ukraine has significantly disrupted energy markets in Europe. Poland, historically reliant on Russian oil and gas, faced supply disruptions and skyrocketing prices. This crisis exposed Poland's reliance on fossil fuels, particularly coal. The war has forced Poland to prioritize energy security and reduce reliance on Russia. This shift accelerates both short-term and long-term energy strategies within Poland. The massive influx of Ukrainian refugees into Poland has placed additional strain on the country's energy infrastructure and resources.

Efficiency of Renewable Energy Use in Poland Compared to EU Countries

Renewable energy is a key element for achieving the EU's Green Deal objectives. Its implementation will create an opportunity for decarbonisation of the heating sector.[24] Decarbonisation means phasing out coal-based sources. It is necessary to look at this process from the perspective of both advantages and disadvantages, as issues such as the availability of raw materials, costs, and the scale of the problem in Poland may raise doubts.

Heating is an area that plays an important role for Polish households, due to the temperate climate and the occurrence of low temperatures that require heating of houses and flats. Poland has a huge problem in this sector, as it is based predominantly on 1950s technology. Lack of modernisation of equipment contributes to, indeed accumulates, problems.[25] The first of these concerns air pollution, which affects the quality of life and health of residents (e.g. throat, eye and nose irritation, lung diseases, carcinogenic effects, and others). Fig. 2 presents data on the average air quality in Polish cities in the period 2019-2020, and the ranking position occupied, based on data from the European Urban Air Quality Browser, which compares the average levels of fine particulate matter over the last two calendar years.[26] The study covered 323 cities, including 40 Polish cities. Air quality was determined on a four-grade scale, where:

- Good quality, means the level of occurrence of fine particles in the air, which is below the reference value - 10 µg/m3 according to WHO,

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[24] Mary Dobbs, Viviane Gravey, Ludivine Petetin, "Driving the European Green Deal in Turbulent Times," *Politics and Governance* vol. 9, no. 3/ 2021, https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i3.4321; European Commission, *op. cit.*

[25] Boguslav Regulski, Piotr Ziembicki, Jan Bernasiński, Arkadiusz Węglarz, "Rynek Ciepłowniczy w Polsce" (Heating Market in Poland), *Rynek Energii* (Energy Market), vol. 113, no. 4/2014, pp. 9-16.

[26] European Environment Agency, "European City Air Quality Viewer," https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/urban-air-quality/european-city-air-quality-viewer, accessed January 6, 2022.

- Moderate quality - below 15 µg/m3;
- Poor quality - less than 25 µg/m3;
- very poor - above 25 µg/m3.

Good (less then 10 µg/m³)	Moderate(less then 15 µg/m³)	Poor (less thenj 25 µg/m³)	Very poor(above 25 µg/m³)
	•Suwałki (176)	•Toruń (253)	•Zgierz (319)
	•Słupsk (177)	•Wałbrzych (254)	•Nowy Sącz (323)
	•Zielona Góra (192)	•Ostrowiec Św. (255)	
	•Szczecin (209)	•Opole (261)	
	•Gdańsk (224)	•Wrocław (262)	
	•Elbląg (227)	•Płock (265)	
	•Koszalin (229)	•Rzeszów (268)	
	•Białysok (236)	•Warszawa (269)	
	•Bydgoszcz (237)	•Poznań (275)	
	•Olsztyn (245)	•Kielce (277)	
	•Gorzów Wielkopolski (249)	•Chełm (284)	
		•Przemyśl (285)	
		•Łódź (286)	
		•Lublin (287)	
		•Zamość (288)	
		•Siedlce (290)	
		•Grudziadz (295)	
		•Radom (297)	
		•Jelenia Góra (300)	
		•Kalisz (301)	
		•Tarnow (302)	
		•Częstochowa (305)	
		•Łomża (309)	
		•Bielsko-Biała (310)	
		•Górnośląski Związek Metropolitalny (312)	
		•Kraków (316)	
		•Piotrkow Trybunalski (318)	

Figure 3. Quality of air in Polish cities
Source: European city air quality viewer — European Environment Agency, https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/urban-air-quality/european-city-air-quality-viewer [6 January 2023 r.].

As shown in Fig. 3, none of the Polish cities meet the pollution level limits. Only 11 Polish cities meet the conditions for moderate air quality, ranking them between 176 and 249th place among 323 European cities. Most Polish cities (27) are ranked between 253 and 318 and are described as having poor air quality. The last place is occupied by the Polish city of Nowy Sącz. This is symbolic of the fact that Poland is one of the most polluted countries in the entire EU, at a time when our European partners have bet on renewable energy.[27]

[27] Barbara Rogala, "Po Raz Pierwszy w Historii Unii Europejskiej OZE Dostarczyły Więcej Energii Niż Węgiel" (For the first time in the history of the European Union, renewable energy sources provided more energy than coal), https://300gospodarka.pl/news/po-raz-pierwszy-w-historii-unii-europejskiej-oze-dostarczyly-wiecej-energii-niz-wegiel, accessed January 2, 2022.

The poor quality of the air is due to the use of coal as the main ingredient in heating homes. The question could be posed as to whether the Polish authorities are choosing not to increase renewable energy production due to economic considerations? A positive answer to yes could explain the Polish energy policy, which chooses to invest so little in renewable energy production equipment and maintains coal mining. In Poland, energy production is based on hard coal and lignite, thanks to which we produce as much as 70% of energy. Renewable energy accounts for only 20% of total production. It is worth noting that Poland is an importer of energy, and we purchase it mainly from Sweden and Germany.[28]

Due to economic issues resulting from high energy prices, attention should be paid to the benefits for the prosumer, who invests his/her own funds, with the support of EU subsidies (under the My Electricity Programme) for energy-producing devices - i.e. photovoltaics. In this case, the state gains environmental and health benefits, while no costs are incurred. In 2020, it was possible to record an increase in the production of renewable energy - above all prosumer photovoltaics. Solar power plants supplied as much as 176% more energy to the system year-on-year (2 TWh). Co-firing of biomass with coal increased by 20% (to 2.2 TWh), supported by the high price of CO2 emission rights. In third and fourth place in terms of growth among 'green' power plants were biogas plants (up 10% to 1.2 TWh) and hydroelectric power plants (up 8% to 2.1 TWh). This demonstrates the strong interest of the Polish public in seeking alternatives to traditional forms of home heating.

In May 2021, the Ministry of Climate and Environment announced that, with a view to aligning Polish regulations with EU legislation, a change to the prosumer system is planned. Chaos, lack of consideration and lack of public consultation were the main allegations reported by the daily press when analysing the project. In December, the Sejm adopted the amendment to the Renewable Energy Sources Act,[29] and the Ministry argues in an announcement that the proposed changes are very beneficial for the prosumer. They concern the withdrawal of the discount model and the introduction of net-billing. Unfortunately, many experts report negative effects of the legislative changes. For example, the Photovoltaic Industry Association POLSKA PV points out that the originally proposed rules may have negative economic, social, economic, and legal consequences, leading, for example, to the liquidation of approximately 13,500 companies on the Polish PV market.[30] This is not the only negative effect. The fear and insecurity resulting from the irresponsible behaviour of government representatives will affect

[28] Bartlomiej Derski, "Źródła Energii w Polsce w 2020: Mniej Węgla, Więcej Gazu i OZE" (Energy Sources in Poland in 2020: Less Coal, More Gas and Renewable Energ), https://wysokienapiecie.pl/35619-zrodla-energii-w-polsce-w-2020-mniej-wegla-wiecej-gazu-oze/, accessed January 7, 2022

[29] Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska, "Sejm Przyjął Nowelizację Ustawy o Odnawialnych Źródłach Energii Wprowadzającą Zmiany do Systemu Rozliczeń Prosumentów - Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska - Portal Gov.pl." (Ministry of Climate and Environment. "The Parliament adopted an amendment to the Renewable Energy Sources Act introducing changes to the Prosumer Settlement System - Ministry of Climate and Environment - Gov.pl website), https://www.gov.pl/web/klimat/sejm-przyjal-nowelizacje-ustawy-o-odnawialnych-zrodlach-energii-wprowadzajaca-zmiany-do-systemu-rozliczen-prosumentow, accessed January 10, 2022.

[30] "Projekt Zmiany Systemu Prosumenckiego. Zagrożone 13,5 tys. Firm i 86 tys. Miejsc Pracy?" (Prosumer System Change Project. 13.5 thousand at risk Companies and 86 thousand Jobs), https://www.teraz-srodowisko.pl/aktualnosci/system-prosumencki-miejsca-pracy-instalacje-PV-11107.html, accessed January 10, 2022.

citizens' decisions regarding investments in photovoltaics. It can be assumed that the proposed changes will contribute to changing the trend from increasing to decreasing. This means that fewer and fewer people may decide to invest in renewable energy sources in the coming years. The reason for this will be investment uncertainty, which will hinder the development of this branch of the economy.

Conclusion

The provision of clean and cheap energy is the most important premise for the implementation of the European Green Deal. The heating sector has the most important role in this aspect, as it is responsible for both environmental pollution and the high costs associated with it. It is also an important element not only of government policy, but of household budgets. This article provides an overview of the EU's strategy and Poland's objectives in the field of renewable energy. Based on this analysis, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Poland does not have high ambitions for the development of renewable energy in Poland. It is a country that, in its latest strategy, downplays the role of renewable energy, placing great emphasis on security of supply. However, it should be pointed out that solving the problems of balancing the energy system through the use of renewable energy can help solve security issues.

2. Government policy on renewable energy is ineffective. On the one hand, it does not take into account non-economic factors, including environmental and health issues, and, on the other, it does not propose low-cost solutions for obtaining energy. It allows the coal sector to be maintained, at the expense of other social groups in Poland.

3. There have been very big changes in the heating sector in Poland in the last year. Unfortunately, potential prosumers have not been informed at what price ratio they will be billed in terms of selling and re-purchasing energy. It should be noted that under the previous billing system, prosumers had to hand over 20% of the energy they produced to the energy company. However, the utility did not incur any costs for this. However, the legislator did not take care to indicate this ratio. Thus, on the basis of the analysis, it can be assumed that the changes proposed in 2021 will adversely affect the decision of potential prosumers, and some of them will consider disconnecting from the grid and purchasing energy banks in the future.

Despite these unfavourable conclusions for Poland, it should be noted that there is some hope for a change of trend in the implementation of the Green Deal targets. In the parliamentary elections held in October, the opposition managed to defeat the ruling Law and Justice party. The government, elected in 2023, has expressed their intention to accelerate the energy transition. Their plans include raising the share of renewables in electricity production to 68% by 2030 and expanding the grid to create a more decentralized energy system. These developments, combined, indicate a shift towards a more prominent role for renewable energy in Poland's future energy mix. It's important to note that this transition will likely be multifaceted and involve various strategies alongside specific policy changes.

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The Impact of the Middle East's Regional Dynamics on the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood

Raluca Moldovan

Abstract. The Middle East is a region of great importance for the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, and regional dynamics in the Middle East have significant implications for the countries in this area. The outbreak of the latest round of conflict in the region after Hamas's brutal attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, has had major global and regional consequences, also affecting the relations between the European Union and its Eastern Neighbourhood, a region that has already borne the brunt of two years of war between Russia and Ukraine. The current chapter aims to investigate how three important Middle Eastern actors, Israel, Turkey, and Iran, have positioned themselves with regard to the current Gaza war and how this event has impacted the countries in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, as well as the future of the war in Ukraine.

Keywords: European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood, Israel, Turkey, Iran, war in the Middle East

Introduction: the age of war and global disorder

That global conflicts are intensifying and multiplying, three decades after Francis Fukuyama famously proclaimed the "end of history" is plain to see – from Ukraine to Gaza, from Syria to the Caucasus and from Sudan to Niger. According to a recent data analysis gathered by the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, conducted by the Peace Research Institute Oslo, the number, intensity, and length of conflicts worldwide is at its highest level since before the end of the Cold War. The study found that there were 55 active conflicts in 2022, with the average one lasting about eight to 11 years, a substantial increase from the 33 active conflicts lasting an average of seven years a decade earlier.[1] Despite this alarmingly high number, attempts at peaceful mediation and settlement, most often made by the United Nations Organisation, in places like Libya, Sudan, or Yemen, have stalled, woefully collapsed or yielded no tangible results whatsoever. Once frozen conflicts, such as those in Myanmar or Israel, are thawing one by one, and – after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine – open war has returned to Europe, in an almost unthinkable reversal of history that would have seemed all but fanciful a decade ago. Could a period of pre-global war be unfolding before our very eyes? Students of history will argue that World War II also began as an aggregation of various regional crises, as Hal Brands argues: "Japan's rampage in China and the Asia-Pacific; Italy's bid for empire in Africa and the Mediterranean; and Germany's push for hegemony in Europe and beyond. In some ways, these crises were always linked. Each was the work of an autocratic regime with a penchant for coercion and violence. Each involved a lunge for dominance in a

[1] Emma Beals, Peter Salisbury, "A World at War," *Foreign Affairs*, October 30, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1130975.

globally significant region. Each contributed to what U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, in 1937, called a spreading 'epidemic of world lawlessness.'"[2]

The most oft-invoked response to these developments on the part of great powers and international organisations alike has been a shift in position from "conflict resolution" to "conflict management" – but, as the October 7 Hamas attack against Israel has demonstrated, a conflict can only be managed for so long before it escalates. A new approach to global conflict is urgently needed, yet no actor has so far stepped forward by proposing a working solution, or even the beginnings of one. One cannot approach 21st century conflicts, whose nature is clearly changing, the same way as one did early 20th century wars: nowadays, most conflicts tend to involve states and armed groups committed to different causes with access to relatively advanced weaponry and other forms of technology, as well as money earned from natural resources and criminal activity.[3] Conflicts have also become significantly more internationalised, as countries such as Russia, Turkey, the US, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia or Iran being regularly drawn, directly or by proxy, into foreign wars, especially in the Middle East and Africa, while the UN, once the de facto mediator, has lost much of its clout and credibility amid the current great power geopolitical competition involving the US, Russia and China that has paralysed the Security Council in recent years. A lot of the attention has shifted towards dealing with the consequences of conflicts (refugees, cross-border weapons smuggling) than with their causes and, instead of striving to find permanent solutions to global crises, limited détente or short-term goals now seem to be the norm – as was the case with the 2022 negotiated agreement that allowed Ukrainian grain to pass through the Black Sea. Once conflicts show relative signs of de-escalation, attention quickly focuses elsewhere, and it is easy to miss the signs that fighting is about to restart, especially when armed actors remain in control after failed peace processes, as was the case with Hamas in Gaza since 2007, after the failure of the Oslo Process.

The chances of meaningful political settlements appear particularly low in the Middle East, where a low-burner conflict between Israel and Hamas, which had been simmering for a long time, finally exploded with brutal force on October 7, 2023, immediately drawing in other global actors and opening a second war front in the EU's southern neighbourhood, after the ongoing Eastern one in Ukraine. Non-state actors like the Yemeni Houthis, who appeared largely pacified after the latest round of negotiations with Saudi Arabia, are now the target of American and British airstrikes, after their drones wreaked havoc against foreign ships in the Red Sea, while Iran is gearing up its "axis of resistance", hoping to use the regional chaos caused by the surge in violence after the Hamas attack as a ladder. As an added irony, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, hoping to emphasise the Biden administration's foreign policy bona fides, claimed the Middle East was quieter at that point than it had been in the previous two decades[4] – a week before Hamas's terror against Israel laid bare the limits of

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[2] Hal Brands, "The Next Global War," *Foreign Affairs*, January 26, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/next-global-war. See also Philip Zelikow, "The Atrophy of American Statecraft," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2024 issue, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/atrophy-american- statecraft-zelikow.
[3] Beals, Salisbury*, art. cit.*
[4] *Ibidem*.

regional containment. Many Western diplomats have long argued that the status quo in Gaza and the West Bank was untenable, but in the aftermath of the Abraham Accords, when it became evident that normalisation between Israel and several former adversarial Arab states was possible without addressing the Palestinian question, Israel energetically pursued a peace treaty with Saudi Arabia, hoping to get away with making zero territorial concessions to the Palestinian population.[5]

Today's great powers (China, Russia, the EU and the US) will certainly continue to have a role to play in both the Ukraine and the Israel-Gaza conflict – but it is far less certain that they will be able to resolve or contain them, especially considering that the revisionist powers China and Russia have a not-so-vested interest in fanning the flames of conflict to advance their own agendas.[6] Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a textbook example of great power competition, Cold War-style, designed to resist what Russian president Putin considers to be American primacy and involvement in Europe through force and fear. In the words of Kimmage and Notte, "By subjugating the Ukrainian polity, Putin hoped to initiate a new era of global politics, one detached from American leadership. He promised an international system that would be genuinely postcolonial, solicitous of conservative values, and robustly multipolar, with Russia serving as one of its central arbiters."[7] But, unlike during the Cold War era, in the case of Western powers, toxic domestic politics often get in the way of their international ambitions.[8] The internal divisions in the US and the European Union concerning support for Israel in the aftermath of the Hamas attack are case in point, especially considering the incredibly stakes of the 2024 electoral year on both sides of the Atlantic. And amid this state of great power distraction, dangerous vacuums of power are proliferating and are affecting the capacity of democratic actors to respond to international crises – as it is evident now with the war in Ukraine after the renewed outbreak of violence in the Middle East. Four months into this latest conflict, the four great powers mentioned above are still responding in inadequate ways, driven largely by self-interested calculations: Russia largely depends on Iran for military aid, the United States have lent significant support to Israel but have had a hard time bringing the Palestinians to the table, China has generously offered platitudes about peace but has tried to avoid any kind of direct involvement, and Europe has once more found itself largely without leverage, a bystander rather than a broker.[9] This is an evident microcosm of the 21st century

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[5] An Arab Barometer survey conducted in Gaza right on the eve of the October 7 attack revealed that most Gazans view negatively the normalisation of relations between Israel and Arab states (only 10% expressed positive views), since they see Arab solidarity as key to any political arrangement that would lead to an independent Palestinian state. See Amaney A. Jamal, Michael Robbins, "What Palestinians Really Think of Hamas," *Foreign Affairs*, October 25, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1130872.

[6] Michael Kimmage, Hanna Notte, "The Age of Great-Power Distraction," *Foreign Affairs*, October 12, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1130830.

[7] Michael Kimmage, Hanna Notte, "How Russia Globalized the War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, September 1, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/how-russia- globalized-war-in-ukraine. As the authors rightfully observe, todays' Russia is in a confusing category of its own: a regional power with significant global reach.

[8] Kimmage, Notte, "Great Power Distraction."

[9] *Ibidem*. See also Denis Cenușă, "Criza din Orientul Mijlociu și perspectiva europeană pentru Ucraina, Moldova și Georgia" (The Crisis in the Middle East and Moldova and Georgia's European Perspective), Contributors.ro, November 1, 2023, https://www.contributors.ro/criza-din-orientul-mijlociu-si-perspectiva-europeana-pentru-ucraina-moldova-si-georgia/.

international order in which everyone competes for different geopolitical prizes and great power distraction is, by and large, a collective curse. As Kimmage and Notte argue, "the current cocktail of competition and distraction poses a different problem, one the world is ill prepared to tackle. Tension now emanates from two separate and often overlapping sources: the collision of great powers' ambitions in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia as well as the great powers' paralysis and passivity outside of a few hot spots. And so, a profusion of crises is emerging in which midsize powers, small powers, and even nonstate actors collide, and the great powers can neither deter nor contain them. Great-power distraction invites considerable long-term risk. It invites revisionism and aggressive risk-taking by other actors."[10]

Among the great powers, China's response to this latest crisis has been the most carefully calibrated, as it once more leaned into the disorder: while the US has seen its popularity among countries in the Global South and the Middle East take a plunge on account of its support for Israel,[11] China has paid close attention to public opinion in these parts of the world: by calling for a two-state solution, refusing to condemn Hamas, and making symbolic efforts to support a cease-fire, it has taken advantage of global anti-Israeli sentiment in a bid to elevate its own standing in the global South.[12] Comparing this response to the one China offered to the war in Ukraine is relevant in several respects: after Russia's February 2022 invasion, Beijing, seemingly caught off guard, initially put forward confusing statements underlying Ukraine's territorial inviolability while at the same time acknowledging Russia's "reasonable security concerns" and criticising the US and NATO.[13] But immediately after October 7, China tried to exploit the crisis to expose "American double standards" given that, as Chinese state television argued, "Jews account for 3% of the American population, yet control 70% of its wealth".[14] China's outreach seems to be paying off, so far: in November 2023, a group of Arab foreign ministers started a tour of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, whose first stop was Beijing – a choice that cannot have been accidental, signalling to the world that they have choices apart from just the US or its Western allies. Perhaps the fact that China presents itself as a champion of the "multicivilizational world" and does not insist on tying these countries into an anti-Western alliance, but sees them as partners in development, has a lot to do with this.[15] As the number of civilian casualties rises in Gaza, the Western arguments defending a rules-based international order ring more and more hollow in the global South. This will clearly have lasting consequences for Ukraine, whose legitimacy in its struggle against Russia comes precisely from the latter's violating these rules. And, if

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[10] *Ibidem*.
[11] The Arab Barometer survey mentioned earlier shows that only 15% of Gazans believe that the Biden administration policies have been good for the Arab world.
[12] Mark Leonard, "China's Game in Gaza," *Foreign Affairs*, January 8, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/chinas-game-gaza. Russia is advancing a similar narrative in which the "real aggressors" (the United States), by becoming involved in the war in Ukraine, have diverted attention and resources from more pressing global concerns such as climate, debt, energy, food and health. See Daniel S. Hamilton, Angela Stent, "Can America Win Over the World's Middle Powers?," *Foreign Affairs*, November 14, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/can-america-win- over-worlds-middle-powers.
[13] Leonard, *art. cit.*
[14] *Ibidem*.
[15] *Ibidem*.

Chinese president Xi is eyeing an invasion of Taiwan in the not too distant future, his stance on Gaza might mean that the global South will not speak against it.

Despite the recent show of force against the Houthis, the US is unlikely to commit itself militarily and diplomatically once more to the Middle East, especially if Joe Biden, an advocate of pivoting away from the region, manages to secure a second term in the White House after November 2024. Three major risks threaten the US position in the Middle East, whose consequences have already been visible in Iraq and Afghanistan: escalation, backlash and overstretch. But if the US would like to be done with the Middle East, the Middle East is clearly not done with America, since the latter's hope to transfer some of its security burden onto states like Saudi Arabia is far from feasible.[16] The problem is that the current conflict in the Middle East is also affecting the way in which the US can support Ukraine in its war with Russia going forward, since the willingness of US policy makers, especially within the Republican Party, to keep providing military and financial aid to Ukraine has been steadily dwindling in the last months. A likely return of Donald Trump to the White House will significantly affect American aid for Ukraine and play into Russia's hands. Therefore, the aim of the present contribution is to look at the current positions of three major Middle Eastern actors (Israel, Iran and Turkey) after the October 7 attack and how their interplay within the region's dynamics may impact the war in Ukraine and the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood in general in the short and medium-long run. The following sections will be devoted to each actor in turn, while the conclusions will try to outline a few possible future developments for Ukraine and the Eastern Neighbourhood.

Israel and Netanyahu: no "Goldilocks option"[17]

It is crucial, first, to understand that this is not just another round of conflict in Gaza Second, the horrific massacre of at least 1,200 Israelis by Hamas death squads marked a catastrophic collapse of Israel's existing security strategy, as a failure of both vigilance and imagination. The old deterrence model—which assumed that Hamas could be contained through defensive technology and occasional limited and indecisive deterrence operations in Gaza—is dead.[18] We are now, at the time of writing, four months into the conflict and the IDF offensive has proven both bloody and controversial, with no clear end in sight. The success of the offensive is tightly linked to Netanyahu's political and legal future, which is why the veteran embattled Israeli prime minister choose to escalate in the hope of gaining a victory

[16] Jennifer Kavanagh, Frederic Wehrey, "Washington's Looming Middle Eastern Quagmire," *Foreign Affairs*, November 24, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/washingtons-looming-middle-eastern-quagmire.

[17] In the words of Miller and Kurtzer, "Most government policy memos, including many we wrote during our service in the U.S. State Department, propose three options: a bold one that suggests moves the policymaker will find difficult to swallow, a status quo option that allows the policymaker to believe that not much needs to be done, and a 'Goldilocks' option that proposes just enough action to show muscle but not enough to ruffle feathers. Often, the Goldilocks option is chosen it affords a sense of movement while incurring minimal risks." (See Aaron David Miller, Daniel C. Kurtzer, "In Dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, America Has No Easy Way Out," *Foreign Affairs*, December 22, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/dealing-israeli-palestinian-conflict-america-has-no-easy-way-out.

[18] Asaf Orion, "The End of Israel's Gaza Illusions," *Foreign Affairs*, November 3, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1130991.

somewhere else. He doubtless believes that a big victory could protect him from prosecution and incarceration. Who, after all, is going to imprison a war hero?

Defining what it means to defeat Hamas is also important. Beyond a military defeat and ending Hamas rule in Gaza, the war needs to address Hamas's power elsewhere and in other dimensions. Uprooting the group as an ideological and social movement, one that now has deep reach in Palestinian society, will demand more than just crushing it on the battlefield – after all, one can defeat Hamas by taking out their leadership, destroying their power base and tunnels in Gaza, but it is infinitely more difficult to destroy the idea that the organisation stands for. Hamas's radical ideology and narratives, which are a threat to moderate Arab states as well as to Israel, must be countered by local and regional voices which, at least for now, seems to be in short supply.[19] Having Qatar's Al Jazeera on Hamas's side gives Hamas an important advantage among Arab populations across the region, which are stirred by constant visuals of destruction and suffering in Gaza.[20] It also gives the Palestinian cause a lot of traction in the West, given the constant criticism against Israel's war conduct and the massive rallies in Western capitals, bone-chillingly chanting "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" – most likely, without having the slightest notion of what that actually means. Notwithstanding, one thing remains clear: continued violence will not bring the future most Gazans hope for any closer. Instead of stamping out sympathy for terrorism, past Israeli crackdowns that make life more difficult for ordinary Gazans have increased support for Hamas.

Ever since the start of the conflict, there have been real fears that the conflict might expand and escalate throughout the region, drawing in other actors, especially those that are part of Iran's "axis of resistance" (Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Yemeni Houthis, various jihadi militias and Shia Iraqi groups, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, etc.). So far, with the exception of several rather sporadic Hezbollah strikes in Northern Israel and the Houthis' drone attacks in the Red Sea, the conflict has remained largely contained – but this might well be just a temporary state of affairs. After all, Iran has greatly benefited from the Hamas attack and has notably improved its image as a champion of the Palestinian cause throughout the Arab world, religious disputes between Sunnis (such as Hamas, which is a branch of the Muslin Brotherhood) and Shias be damned.

Israel now finds itself in a very difficult position: the offensive has seemingly slowed down, it is facing mounting international criticism for the civilian victims in Gaza, while Netanyahu's unity government has not succeeded in freeing all the hostages taken by Hamas on October 7. Moreover, Netanyahu himself has doubled down on his intransigent position of categorically rejecting a two-state solution that US president Joe Biden proposed at the start of the year. By doing so, Israel might risk alienating its most crucial ally without whose help

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[19] *Ibidem*.

[20] The role that Qatar played for years in propping up Hamas financially, with express Israeli assistance, should not be overlooked: Qatar now seeks to boost its regional relevance by touting its bona fide negotiation credentials and creating the impression that it is actively working for the Palestinian cause. (See Yoel Guzansky, "Qatar's Balancing Act in Gaza," *Foreign Affairs*, January 5, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/qatars-balancing-act-gaza-hamas).

Netanyahu would be greatly constrained in pursuing his war objectives.[21] Biden is already facing criticism from the progressive wing of his own party over the military and financial help that the US has so far provided, while voters are willing (if the polls are to be believed) to punish him for what they see as America's contribution to the "genocide" perpetrated by the IDF in Gaza. The Republican-dominated House of Representatives has already pushed for decoupling the military and financial aid for Israel and the one destined for Ukraine, which has slowed down to a trickle since the start of the Middle Eastern conflict – a clear indication of how the region's dynamics impacts other parts of the world, including the Eastern Neighbourhood. Biden has also come under pressure from other directions (including from Josep Borrell, the High EU Representative) for failing to put enough pressure on what is seen as a trigger-happy Netanyahu to curb Israeli air strikes in Gaza on account of civilian losses. Undoubtedly, the Israeli card (specifically, the support for its Gaza offensive) will play a considerable part in the electoral contests to come, especially in the United States, where young voters manifest significantly less affinity for Israel than older generations, amid a general and worrisome rise in radical left-leaning and progressive tendencies.[22] A potential Trump return to the White House might represent a better guarantee that the aid for Israel will continue, but this will probably lead to increased divisions and controversies across Western societies. Either way, Israel is entirely dependent on the special relationship with the US, because – unlike other Middle Eastern countries – hedging its bets and flirting with Russia or China is not, in this case, a viable option.

The country that Israel becomes in ten years will depend on the political choices it makes now, not only the military decisions: its security and prosperity will turn on whether it creates a new political horizon for its region.[23] A political leader like Netanyahu, who sought to strengthen Hamas's position in Gaza to undermine the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank in order to weaken the prospects for a two-state solution, is probably unfit to direct any part of this process. Netanyahu wagered a lot of his popularity on the Abraham Accords, which bypassed the Palestinian question entirely and seemed to prove what Netanyahu always promised his voters: "peace for peace" instead of "land for peace".[24] A similar peace treaty with Saudi Arabia would have been the ultimate prize, and there is sufficient basis to believe that the US will still endorse it in the foreseeable future.[25] The fact that now, inevitably, Israel must reluctantly remain in Gaza for an extended period of time (since it ruled out both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority as governing bodies,[26] and no one else – least of all the US – would be willing to step up to that role) is unlikely to boost his popularity, already gravely affected by his handling of the hostage crisis.

[21] Shalom Lipner, "How Israel Could Lose America," *Foreign Affairs*, December 29, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/how-israel-could-lose-America.
[22] *Ibidem*.
[23] Ami Ayalon, Gilead Sher, Orni Petrushka, "Why Netanyahu Must Go," *Foreign Affairs*, October 31, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1130979.
[24] Natan Sachs, "Peace between Israelis and Palestinians Remains Possible," *Foreign Affairs*, January 19, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/peace-between-israelis-and- palestinians-remains-possible.
[25] Dalia Dassa Kaye, Sanam Vakil, "Only the Middle East Can Fix the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, February 1, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/middle-east/fix-middle-east-united- states.
[26] Miller, Kurtzer, *art. cit*.

It is too soon to tell whether the Israeli public still supports a two-state solution, despite interminable Western rhetoric to that effect – but one this is clear: Hamas must be removed from power in Gaza before any steps in that direction can be taken. As Ayalon and Sher argue, "Hamas is an idea: the idea that Jews must be permanently removed from the Middle East through violence. This idea will appeal to many Palestinians as long as there is no real peace option to which they can attach their hopes. It is an idea that will never be defeated with guns. There must emerge a better idea, a more attractive idea—an idea that does not assume Jews and Arabs are locked in a zero-sum game in the Middle East but offers a win-win scenario to people on both sides."[27] For now, however, this better idea is nowhere to be seen, as the horizon is filled with bad and difficult choices.

Turkey and Erdoğan: a spanner in the works

Two years after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the war in Gaza presents Turkey's newly re-elected president Erdoğan with another golden opportunity to emphasise his country's regional relevance and, if possible, to throw a spanner in the regional works. True, the start of the conflict also presented him with a serious dilemma: Solidarity with the Palestinians has been a longstanding principle in his foreign policy, one that contributed to a decade-long rift with Israel and its regional friends after Israeli commandos killed Turkish citizens on the blockade-running ship Mavi Marmara in 2010. Erdoğan's electorate, especially his electoral base, see Israel's military response to the October 7 Hamas terror attacks in southern Israel as disproportionate. Yet he has also staked a reset in regional and Western relations on reconciliation with Israel and is unwilling to jettison that process altogether. Initially, immediately after October 7, Erdoğan chose to navigate this dilemma through a three-pronged approach: clear but careful rhetorical and humanitarian support to Gaza; deploying Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to seek common ground with other regional actors; and quietly distancing himself from Hamas in the wake of the attacks. Yet, on October 25, Erdoğan crossed a rhetorical Rubicon in comments to his AK Party cadres, making an unambiguous rebuke of Israel and expressing a level of sympathy for Hamas that had been understated during the first 3 weeks of war.[28] Clearly, to him, positioning himself firmly against Israel and the West in this matter is more politically advantageous. Unlike in the Russia-Ukraine war, in this case, Erdoğan does not play both sides, but plays entirely to the sympathies of Arab publics and countries like Iran, Qatar, and, why not, to a smaller extent, Russia – which al have something to gain from the conflict.

Turkish Foreign Minister Fidan has been even less restrained than Erdoğan rhetorically, saying on October 20 that US President Joe Biden had effectively condoned the destruction of Gaza. He issued a joint statement with his Russian and Iranian counterparts after a regional mini-summit in Tehran. In addition, he attended the Arab League and Islamic Cooperation Organisation sessions on the crisis, which were held in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, respectively.[29]

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[27] Ayalon, Sher, Petrushka, *art. cit*.

[28] Rich Outzen, "Erdogan Leans on Israel, Pushes for Post-war Role in Gaza," Atlantic Council, October 30, 2023, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/erdogan-gaza-hamas-turkey-israel/.

[29] *Ibidem*.

Based on his remarks at the end of October 2023, Erdoğan decided to abandon nuance and balance: for him, Hamas is a national liberation movement, not a terrorist organisation. The Turkish president also cancelled a trip to Israel, planned for the end of last year, and expressed his hope that Turkey could play a guarantor role in a stable post-war Gaza, thus attempting to paint himself as being driven by the best, peaceful intentions.[30] In response, Israel recalled its diplomats from Ankara, dealing a perhaps fatal blow to the efforts to restore diplomatic and economic ties after more than a decade of frosty relations.[31] Erdoğan's anti-Israel stance is part of his wider plan of standing up to what he sees as the West's disproportionate involvement in the Middle East in order to boost his regional hegemonic credentials: thus, at a rally in Istanbul to celebrate the centennial of the Turkish republic, he unequivocally told the massive crowd that the massacre unfolding in Gaza was clearly the work of the West acting through its pawn, the Jewish state.[32] Erdoğan's anti-Israeli narrative has a few important common points with a more general Muslim Brotherhood view (to which Hamas, as its Palestinian branch, undoubtedly subscribes) according to which the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the caliphate came as a result of a plot orchestrated by hidden Jews, descendants of 17th century mystic Jewish scholar Sabbatai Tzvi, who converted to Islam only to sabotage it from within.

Erdoğan is hardly alone in expressing such views and therefore, his remarks will not provoke any notable regional waves: Turkey's reconciliation with Egypt and the Gulf States will not affected. But those remarks were intended for Western consumption anyway, and Washington, despite taking notice, has very little leverage against Erdoğan: at end of January, president Biden urged Congress to approve the sale of a number of F-16 jets to Turkey, a process previously delayed by Erdoğan's decision to buy the Russian S-400 air missile defence system, despite being a NATO member. This counts as a major image victory for Erdoğan, who (possibly taking a page out of his new friend Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's book) proved to his voters and regional allies that one can stand up to the West and still win. Moreover, Erdoğan has woven a rich conspiratorial narrative in Turkey that Washington is jealous of his foreign policy accomplishments, determined to undermine Turkish morals by backing LGBTQ groups, and even bent on overthrowing the Turkish government. In a 2019 poll, more than 80 percent of Turkish respondents named the United States as a leading threat to Turkey.[33]

Just like in the case of the Ukraine war, Erdoğan's ultimate goal is to be present and influential in whatever post-war settlement will be reached at the end of the conflict by positioning Turkey as a sort of "indispensable nation" in the regional tapestry. His ambitions undoubtedly go beyond a regional role: his revisionist views, similar to those of Russia or China, mean that he is eyeing a place on the world stage, where he sees himself as both kingmaker and disruptor, as his attitude towards Sweden's inclusion in NATO has

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[30] Kaye, Vakil, *art. cit.*

[31] NDTV, "Erdogan's 'Crescent-Crusader' Remark Prompt Israel's Diplomatic Recall," October 28, 2023, https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/israel-recalls-diplomats-asks-citi...-turkey-after-erdogans-crescent-crusader-conflict-comment-4523816.

[32] *Ibidem*.

[33] Henry J. Barkey, "Erdogan the Survivor," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2023 Issue, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1130562.

demonstrated.[34] As Barkey argues, “At the same time, Erdoğan presents Turkey, broadly defined as a civilization, as a premier ‘anti-status quo’ and anti-imperialist force. He offers a vision in which Western dominance and Western dominance alone represent the contemporary imperialist threat. His conception of imperialism is, thus, limited: he does not discuss Chinese or Russian imperialism or that of the Ottoman Empire. Despite his antipathy toward Ataturk, Erdoğan has recruited Ataturk’s memory to this cause.”[35] Like any bona fide revolutionary, Erdoğan vows to defeat the status quo. From time to time, he pretends that he is ready to do business on the basis of pure pragmatism and quid pro quo: he has done that to Europe, to America and to Israel, time after time, and there is little basis to believe a seasoned political veteran like him will not continue to exploit every opportunity that comes his way.

Iran and Khamenei: heading the “axis of resistance”

Hamas’s brutal yet successful attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, is undoubtedly hailed as a great victory in Tehran as well. The attack also breathed new life into Iran’s so-called “axis of resistance”, i.e., Hezbollah and other Tehran-backed militias in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and elsewhere.[36] Iran is the mastermind behind this loose alliance, bound together by a shared hatred of American and Israeli “colonialism”, which poses a serious risk to the regional order and often furthers Tehran’s agenda.[37] Some of these actors have already become involved in the conflict, albeit so far only on a limited scale – but since Iran’s leaders will certainly not miss this opportunity to stoke the flames, this limited involvement might not remain limited for much longer, especially if the IDF continues to be bogged down in Gaza without being able to claim a decisive victory. In that case, the consequences of a regional Israel-Iran war (even if it should be carried out by proxy) would be devastated for the Middle East and the world at large, generating massive waves of refugees and affecting international oil markets and the global economic system.[38] Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, president Ebrahim Raisi and the other Iranian leaders have long sought to retaliate against Israel for the latter’s numerous attempts to sabotage Iran’s nuclear programme and, if the IDF were to suffer massive losses in a prolonged Gaza war, they might consider that the balance can actually tip in favour of Iranian forces for a change.

Echoing similar moves made by Russia and China, Iran called on the United Nations and others for a quick end to the Israel-Hamas war, all the while not ruling out being prepared for a protracted fight, even if should carry high human costs. In fact, if past is prelude, the Iranian leadership likely views this war as an opportunity to achieve multiple objectives. Already, Hamas has succeeded in bringing the proxy war between Iran and Israel—typically fought in Lebanon and Syria—to Israeli soil. As Tehran sees it, the conflict could help Hamas permanently deter Israel from attacking Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by teaching Israel that

[34] *Ibidem*.
[35] *Ibidem*.
[36] Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar, “Why Iran Is Gambling on Hamas,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 1, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1130987.
[37] Narges Bajoghli, Vali Nasr, “How the War in Gaza Revived the Axis of Resistance,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 17, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/how-war-gaza-revived-axis-resistance.
[38] Tabaar, *art. cit*.

the costs of invading the territory are prohibitively high. The conflict could further unite Tehran and its allied militias into a lethal and highly coordinated fighting machine. It could give the Islamic Republic a new claim to moral leadership among states outside the West and restore Tehran's credibility in the Arab world.[39] And should the war expand into a regional conflict, it could create a window of opportunity for Iran to finally build a nuclear weapon, all the while keeping the world's attention away from the war in Ukraine and helping Russia, its long-standing ally.

According to the old adage that interest makes strange bedfellows, since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has portrayed itself as a staunch ally of the Palestinian liberation movement. Many of the Islamist and leftist Iranian revolutionaries who toppled the shah drew inspiration from Palestinian writers and fighters. During the 1960s and 1970s, some of these Iranians even received training in Palestinian guerrilla camps. And after the Palestine Liberation Organisation shifted away from violence and toward diplomacy in the mid-1990s, Iran helped cultivate a network of anti-Israel Islamist armed groups, most prominent among them, Hezbollah and Hamas.[40] Building on its success with Hezbollah, in the early 1990s, Iran began backing Hamas, the armed Palestinian organisation that has controlled Gaza since 2007. It is a very odd partnership indeed. As previously mentioned, Hamas was founded after the first Palestinian intifada in 1987 as a branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and has received support not just from Shiite Iran but also from Sunni states, such as Qatar. Hamas is, in fact, a Sunni organisation, and it has cracked down on Gaza's small Shiite population, persecuting Shiite worshipers and closing Shiite charity organisations. Moreover, Hamas aligned itself with the Sunni opposition against Bashar al-Assad during Syria's uprising, even though Assad is one of Iran's closest partners.

Iran is invested in the current Israel-Hamas war from multiple perspectives: it wants its partners, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, to inflict considerable damage on Israel while preventing an Israeli victory in Gaza, thus deterring the Israeli military from mass attacks against the Palestinians again. Iran also believes that such an outcome could protect Palestinians against Israeli settlers by helping a triumphant Hamas, or a similar militant group, rise to power in the West Bank, where the militants could use violence to deter settlers from carrying out attacks. Even if they cannot take charge in other Palestinian territories, a victory would also enable Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to extend their influence beyond Gaza by making the groups much more popular among residents of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. And this outcome is exactly what Israel wants to prevent.[41] Iran would be more than happy to do everything it can to divert Israeli resources and attention away from Gaza, possible laying the groundwork for a new intifada, all the while continuing to score considerable points with Arab populations across the region. For Tehran, the upsides of renewed conflict go beyond a weaker Israel and, possibly, a nuclear weapon. The war in Gaza is fostering solidarity among many countries of the so-called global South, which tend to view U.S. support for Israel as

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[39] *Ibidem*.
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] *Ibidem*.

profoundly hypocritical.[42] Even within the West, many people share this sentiment. By positioning itself at the heart of the Palestinian cause, then, Iran hopes it can claim both global leadership and moral superiority—despite its own reputation as a state that represses its people and interferes with its neighbours.[43] The fact that the current conflict has also derailed the planned Israeli-Saudi rapprochement, at least for the time being, is an added bonus for the ayatollahs' regime. In a surprising new development, the war has, to a certain extent, brought Tehran and Riyadh closer together, considering that president Raisi attended a rare joint meeting of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation hosted by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in November 2023, and the following month, Iranian and Saudi leaders met again in Beijing to discuss the Gaza war.[44] Tehran also believes the war in Gaza can cover up its internal repression. Last year, the streets of Berlin, London, Washington, and other cities across the world were filled with people protesting the Islamic Republic's violence against women. Now, those same streets are occupied by people protesting Israel's attacks on Gaza.[45]

Given that the members of this axis of resistance believe they are fighting the same war against the US and Israel, their attacks – however limited and sporadic so far – will not cease until the guns in Gaza fall silent, which means the US might face being dragged deeper into this escalatory spiral.[46] This being the case, Washington should be disabused of any notion of being able to renegotiate a truce with Iran, since the latter is hellbent on upending the regional order by any means necessary.[47] If anything, Iran is now incentivised to rush the accomplishment of the ultimate deterrent, nuclear weapons, hoping to benefit from the same immunity as North Korea and Russia as it confronts the West.[48]

The Gaza war, in addition to being fought on the ground, is also being waged (more successfully, one could argue) on social media, on Instagram, Telegram, TikTok and X, where many GenZ's are part of the Houthis' global fandom – a fact proven by numerous young protesters at a pro-Palestinian march in London in February 2024, who chanted "Yemen, Yemen, make us proud, turn another ship around".[49] This only proves the extent of public anger now directed against the West, which can easily become the breeding ground for more extremism and political instability, to Moscow's and Beijing's utter glee. These revisionist powers all share the desire to break the US-led global order that deprives them of the greatness they consider themselves entitled to.[50]

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[42] As Bajogli and Nasr argue, "Public opinion across the Middle East, the global South, and even the West increasingly regards the conflict as the consequence of a decades-long occupation rather than as a response to Islamic terrorism." (*art. cit.)*
[43] Tabaar, *art. cit*.
[44] Kaye, Vakil, *art. cit*.
[45] *Ibidem*.
[46] Bajogli, Nasr, *art. cit*.
[47] Suzanne Maloney, "The End of America's Exit Strategy in the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, October 10, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/middle-east/israel-hamas-end- americas-exit-strategy-suzanne-maloney.
[48] Ali Vaez, "Why the War in Gaza Makes a Nuclear Iran More Likely," *Foreign Affairs*, January 25, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/why-war-gaza-makes-nuclear- iran-more-likely.
[49] Bajogli, Nasr, *art. cit*.
[50] Brands, *art. cit*.

Conclusions: what prospects for the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood?

The current amalgam of geopolitical crises, which are taking place in parallel, in the immediate and more distant neighbourhood of the EU, to the East and South, has demonstrated that the geographical area where European interventions can be more effective is limited. For this reason, the EU must choose to be omnipresent or intelligently select the priorities where to impose its presence, resulting from a prudent cost-benefit analysis of the available resources and the objectives drawn. In this sense, the EU can combine the management of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza with the ceasefire, cementing support for Ukraine against Russian aggression and streamlining the enlargement process, with the aim of stabilizing and securing its immediate neighbourhood in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership - Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Treating these three processes as a priority, simultaneously, can allow the EU to avoid a sharp deterioration of the regional geopolitical situation, which can be accompanied by a multiplication of crises. In the context of the war in Gaza, a truth that has been known for a long time has been reiterated: the EU has limited leverage to manage another geopolitical crisis on the periphery, as it is exhausted by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. This being the case, the EU's credibility has been damaged once more, negatively influencing Brussels' attempts to extend international alignment to European sanctions against Russia for the anti-Ukrainian war. Moreover, the EU must also confront a sharp turn in public opinion in favour of the Palestinian cause, given that many EU members have significantly large Muslim minorities whose sympathies lie with their Middle Eastern co-religionists (almost 7 million in France and 5.5 million in Germany, to give but two examples).[51]

So, under these circumstances, what can the EU do to ensure that the consequences of the war in the Middle East affect the Eastern Neighbourhood countries as little as possible? In the case of Ukraine, the urgency is to keep the Ukrainian file at the top of the EU's political agenda, especially after Ukraine was given the green light to start accession negotiations. On the one hand, there is a need to ensure political, military and financial support in all spheres related to the war of defence against Russian aggression, including sanctions. The fact that US attention is absorbed by the situation in the Middle East and that aid to Israel seems to become a priority creates some discomfort in Kiev. The EU has previously reiterated that the effectiveness of its support will depend on the sustainability of US assistance. There is already a lack of financial resources within the EU, which has requested to supplement the budget with around 66 billion euros, but the approach was received with objections by the member states, especially in the case of Hungary, who only reluctantly approved the 50 billion Euro aid package for Ukraine in January 2024. Resulting from the decreasing financial resources, the EU is increasingly leaning towards the idea of transferring to Ukraine, for reconstruction needs, the profits deriving from the Russian money (over 200 billion euros) frozen in the EU state as a result of the post-2022 sanctions.[52] On the other hand, the Ukrainian leadership demands the effective opening of accession negotiations with the EU. The political consensus in Brussels corresponds to a good level of technical implementation of the EU conditions. However, the

[51] Cenușă, *art. cit.*
[52] *Ibidem*.

opening of the negotiation chapters could be delayed during 2024, even if the European Council adopted a favourable decision at the end of December.

The dynamic of the reforms in Moldova is seen quite positively in the EU. Although the President of the European Commission gave a positive assessment to the reforms achieved, Ursula von der Leyen also admitted that there would be some "challenges" without specifying them. In any case, the shortcomings of the reforms that the Moldovan authorities must implement as part of the EU requirements are justified by the Moldovan side with the hybrid threats of Russian origin or with the anti-reform resistance within the state institutions. In reality, the discrepancies between the pro-European political ambitions of the government and the quality of the reforms are growing. According to civil society estimates, the level of preparation at the end of June 2023 was evaluated with 4.2 points out of a total of 5. The 9 conditions articulated by the EU in relation to Moldova are less specific than in the case of Ukraine.[53] Therefore, the interpretation of the progress made by the Moldovan authorities is less precise and more subjective than in the case of Ukraine. Moldova has also received the green light to start accession negotiations and, given how the war in Ukraine has been going since the start of 2024, it stands a slightly better chance of progressing faster and further than its neighbour. Of course, the outcome of the 2024 presidential elections in Moldova will play a major role in how these turn out and one can only hope that the country's pro-European path will not be reversed.

The most complicated situation is in Georgia, where the government claims to have implemented the main aspects related to the 12 conditions required by the EU. In reality, the limited legitimacy of the ruling party (Georgian Dream) nullifies confidence in the act of governance in Georgia. However, just as in the case of Ukraine and Moldova, the decision regarding the status of a candidate country for Georgia does not depend on its degree of preparation, but on the EU's geopolitical calculations At the same time, in the later phase, the opening of accession negotiations will have to be strictly conditioned on the completion of reforms where there are currently failures, but also on the quality of the conduct of the parliamentary elections in 2024. Moreover, the EU must develop an agile communication strategy and careful in relation to the possible decision to grant European candidacy to Georgia. Brussels might be obliged to explain to the Georgian public that the candidacy is offered out of strategic calculations. EU conditions must target the quality of democratic processes, with a focus on opposition, media and civil society rights. Georgia's decoupling from Ukraine and Moldova will work more in favour of Russia and Georgian oligarchic interests than against them.[54]

In a more specific sense concerning Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky's immediate and forceful support for Israel in its fight against Hamas has endangered almost a year of concerted efforts by Kyiv to win the support of Arab and Muslim nations in its war against Russia. Zelensky's early statements backing Israel after the surprise attack by Hamas, in which more than 1,400 Israelis were killed, helped Ukraine stay in the international spotlight,

[53] *Ibidem*.
[54] *Ibidem*.

and placed it firmly on the side of the United States. Zelensky's position also drew attention to the increasingly tight relationship between Russia and Iran, which is known as a main sponsor of Hamas, Israel's mortal enemy, and also an important supplier of drones and other weapons for Moscow. Hamas and Russia are the "same evil, and the only difference is that there is a terrorist organisation that attacked Israel and here is a terrorist state that attacked Ukraine," Zelensky said in a speech to NATO's Parliamentary Assembly on Oct. 9.[55] But with Israel's military offensive well into its fourth month, and Palestinian civilian casualties mounting, the war in Gaza is poised to become of the most difficult diplomatic tests for Ukraine since Russia's invasion in February 2022.

Tension with Muslim and Arab nations, however, is just one risk facing Kyiv, which has also had to contend with the world's attention shifting largely to a new war in the Middle East, as well as competing demands for U.S. military support at a time when the House of Representatives speaker, Republican Mike Johnson has opposed sending additional aid to Ukraine and has refused to bring the aid bill for a vote on the House floor even after the US Senate approved it in February 2024. It is clear that public support for Ukraine is dwindling both in the US and across the EU, where scepticism about the necessity to keep sending military and financial aid to Kyiv is voiced more and more often in the public sphere.[56] As Fix and Kimmage argue, "the longer the conflict continues, the more the David and Goliath struggle of its early days will fade into the background, fuelling a perception of futility and bolstering calls to find at least a cosmetic solution. The main risk for Ukraine is less an abrupt political shift in the West than the slow unravelling of a carefully woven web of foreign assistance. If a sudden shift does occur, however, it will start in the United States, where the basic direction of U.S. foreign policy will be on the ballot in November 2024."[57]

Even under war circumstances, Israel already made clear it was not going to reciprocate with greater support for Ukraine. Netanyahu undoubtedly believes Israel has no choice but to maintain its relationship with Moscow, in part because of Russia's control over Syria, and rejected Zelensky's offer to visit after the Hamas attack. In the eyes of world public opinion, Zelensky's pro-Israel position makes little sense, as many Arab and Muslim countries see more similarities between Israel and Russia, as aggressive military powers, than they do between Israel and Ukraine.[58] Zelensky might garner more sympathy if he might be willing to say that what Russia is doing in Ukraine is similar what Israel is doing in Gaza, but that would go against the values the Ukrainian president has stood for since the start of the Russian invasion. Just as Russian President Vladimir Putin initially offered no direct condolences to Israel and no firm rebuke of Hamas, Zelensky was slow to speak about the need to protect Palestinian civilians in Gaza as Israel stepped up retaliatory airstrikes. Only ten days later did Zelensky

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[55] Isabel Koshiw, "New Danger for Ukraine: Taking Israel's Side in War against Hamas and Gaza," *The Washington Post*, October 29, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/29/ukraine-israel-gaza-russia-support/.
[56] Susi Dennison, Pawel Zerka, "Europe's Emerging War Fatigue," *Foreign Affairs*, December 18, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/eastern-europe-and-former-soviet- union/europes-emerging-war-fatigue.
[57] Liana Fix, Michael Kimmage, "Will the West Abandon Ukraine?," *Foreign Affairs*, September 12, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/will-west-abandon-Ukraine.
[58] Koshiw, *art. cit*.

indirectly allude to the bombardment of Gaza by calling for the need to protect civilians and for de-escalation.[59] In all likelihood, the issue of Ukraine has never been at the forefront for the Arab world, as these countries see the war as something that does not concern them. For the moment at least, Israel and the war in Gaza are taking up so much bandwidth that hardly anybody in the Middle East really is thinking about Ukraine right now. But with Russia stepping up attacks on the eastern front, Ukraine can hardly afford to lose any friends. This is especially true given increasing opposition by Republicans in Congress to sending more aid to Ukraine.[60]

For now, the Israel-Gaza crisis does not seem to endanger the EU's enlargement policy. However, if the conflict spirals out of control and becomes a regional war, the EU will find it difficult to ensure the same level of attention and resources for Ukraine and the process of enlargement to the East. Therefore, although the EU blundered its initial response to the war, it must become pro-active and impartial in handling the crisis in the Middle East to prevent a possible deterioration of the situation in its immediate vicinity, especially considering Vladimir Putin's statement after the October 7 attack that both conflicts are part of a single, wider struggle "that will decide the fate of Russia, and of the entire world."[61] Western indifference risks becoming one of Putin's most effective weapons in winning this struggle.

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[59] *Ibidem*.
[60] *Ibidem*.
[61] Quoted in Brands, *art. cit.*

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Global Cooperation In The Post-War Reconstruction Of Ukraine

Maria Teodora Hodorog

Abstract. Global cooperation in the context of the cease-fire of Russian aggression in Ukraine is essential to rebuilding the Ukrainian nation and preserving the national community and its identity. Through diplomatic support and long-term planning for development and reconstruction, the global community should aim for stability, long-lasting peace, and the integration of Ukraine into NATO, as the nation will remain fragile in the following years, whether or not a peace agreement is signed with Russia. However, the complexity of global cooperation can represent a hindrance to an effective, long-lasting commitment to the reconstruction of Ukraine due to the uncoordinated and divided efforts of the various members of the global community. These obstacles should be thoroughly analysed to avoid empowering a temporary solution, which can lead to a Maginot Line in Ukraine's security development and environment.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine war, reconstruction, NATO, global cooperation

Introduction

Almost two years after the start of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, we still have a nation dealing with the atrocities and the negative impact on the economic, political, social, and cultural aspects, highlighting the current world order issues, and questioning the global institutions and their approach and their involvement to put an end to one of the main enemies of the pro-West democratic principles and ethics. Due to physical damage to the infrastructure, such as railways, roads, utilities, and buildings, there is limited communication and transportation to the areas affected by the war. Issues that impact the infrastructure and disrupt trade possibilities, leading to a decline in the economy and currency depreciation, have had a huge impact on the role international organisations have and will continue to have in helping with the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. Reconstructing the nation, not only the country, needs a long-term reconstruction approach for a sustainable future for Ukraine, harbouring its people and their national identity. Moreover, the conflict zones have displaced communities and caused social disruption, leading to the closure of educational institutions and workplaces. The psychological impact on the population and the sense of community are also being impacted and questioned in this reconstruction process.

Through diplomatic support and sustainable development planning, international organisations should target long-lasting peace to avoid any frozen conflicts that led to the war, which is still ongoing to this day, integration in NATO, and stability of the economic, social, and political systems due to the fragile state of Ukraine in the following years. Due to the complexity of cooperation at a global level, a long-lasting and effective commitment to the reconstruction of the country and nation will be the main concern of the members of the global community, dealing with possible uncoordinated or divided efforts that can impact foreign policy and limit the future humanitarian aid of the member states. One of the concerns about the unfortunate events happening in Ukraine is that the upcoming elections in the United States

and Europe will turn the external attention from the war to internal affairs and goals, limiting the financial and humanitarian aid allocated to fight against Russia.

This paper aims to analyse and offer possible solutions for creating stability and long-lasting peace in the European Union's eastern neighbourhood, impacting humanitarian intervention, risk and threat awareness, and diplomatic encounters in order to maintain a conflict-free Europe through a new international security order. The approach to global cooperation and its limitations are reflected in the past actions and decisions of the members of the global community; thus, there is a need for analysis and anticipation of the state behaviours, geopolitics, and factors that can easily influence and empower a rushed solution for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine.

Ukraine, 2024.

In the past two years, Ukraine has shown a strong sense of national identity and willingness to adopt international cooperation in state affairs to fight Russian aggression in order to achieve a peaceful and stable Eastern European neighbourhood. However, one cannot conclude a war only by relying on the commitment and implications of its citizens without considering external aid from member states of international organisations like NATO and the U.N. We know that global cooperation is important for several reasons, reflecting the interconnected nature of today's world. For example, global cooperation is vital for Ukraine to maintain peace and security on its territory. Collaborative efforts, such as diplomatic negotiations, which can seem impossible when dealing with Russia, peacekeeping missions, and arms control agreements, are crucial for preventing conflicts and resolving disputes peacefully. These few elements can create a safer environment for the European Union and its neighbourhood and empower diplomatic measures over military ones.

We can see that Ukraine is becoming stronger day by day through an immense sense of nationalism and identity, which is, of course, highly needed to fight against Russian aggression. The Ukrainian national identity strengthens along with the Russian propaganda, as they co-exist to prove two opposing perspectives; however, only one can prevail in the end. This strong sense of identity also encourages the nations and allies to fight with them and support their future decisions, as it makes us wonder what type of country Ukraine will be in the future and what military, and socio-economic path they will take in the years following the end of the war.

As of January 2024, Ukraine has managed to improve its logistics capabilities, bringing the country's GDP to 3.5%, according to Yuliia Svyrydenko, Economy Minister of Ukraine, adding that after the start of the Russian invasion, Ukraine has been able to demonstrate record-breaking export volumes thanks to the running of the Ukrainian sea corridor. Additionally, the country has been able to boost economic activity, mainly through agriculture, metallurgical manufacturers, and railway transportation.[1] The help received from international trade partners in 2022, including Romania with 3.9% exports and 1.5% imports and Poland with 6.69%

[1] Ukrinform, "Economy Ministry: Ukraine's GDP Rises by 3.5% in Jan 2024," February 14, 2024, https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-economy/3826590-economy-ministry-ukraines-gdp-rises-by-35-in-jan-2024.html.

exports and 5.49% imports,[2] helped Ukraine maintain a good economic state during the war, which will positively impact the recovery of the country in the post-war period. There is a clear tendency for Ukraine to become more independent of international economic aid, relying more on its own economic capability to provide for war-time necessities through increased exports and investment opportunities.

On a social level, Ukraine is facing difficulties in providing humanitarian assistance to 4 million people living in shared sites, due to being displaced across the country, while other 3.3. million people belong to communities in the southeast region of the country, where the territories are occupied by Russia.[3] There is a constant need to provide necessities to the people who are living in the front-line communities, who are constantly under threat of being attacked, especially during the winter period, increasing the expenses per capita. As the aggression continues, more people who are still in Ukraine will require humanitarian assistance to ensure their safety and sustainable aid to continue working in factories or enterprises in order to provide for the war-time technologies and needs. Ukraine is in a state of awareness that its citizens, who are still working during the Russian aggression, are the most important at the moment, thankfully driven by their national identity sense, which allows them to offer a more sustainable and self-reliable economy for the country now and in the post-war period, where the economic stability of the country will be the key factor in bringing Ukraine back on its feet.

As the elections in Europe and the U.S. are approaching, there will be an increase in pressure coming from outside for President Zelenskyy to decide whether or not there will be a conclusion to this war, reaching an agreement with President Putin, or if Ukraine will continue to defend themselves and their land against Russia. Both decisions are not so favourable for Ukraine, however, 2024 is a year when, if a decision is not taken by President Zelenskyy, interference from the West, more specifically from Washington, will most likely happen by the end of the year or at the beginning of 2025. Depending on the results of the 2024 elections, we can have a more clear vision of how the aggression in Ukraine will come to an end. President Putin's ambitions to make Russia the next great power in the world represent his determination to continue pushing to reshape Europe, meaning that there is no real hope for reaching an agreement between Ukraine and Russia, and, furthermore, to abandon its plans to directly contribute to the new world order in which Russia is the sole winner of this war. With changes in the foreign policy of the U.S. and most NATO and EU member states, there is a concern over which countries will continue to provide humanitarian assistance and financial aid to Ukraine, and what perspectives for the future of the country are brought to the table of negotiations with Russia in the best-case scenario. Kiel Institute for the World Economy published an article tracking the humanitarian, military, and financial support given to Ukraine from the beginning of 2022 until the second half of 2023, showing that 41 countries from all over the world engaged in providing support for Ukraine, however, there was a significant drop

[2] Statista, "Key Trade Partners of Ukraine 2022," Statista Research Department, October 5, 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1297572/ukraine-trade-revenue-by-country/.

[3] UNHCR, "Ukraine: Summary of the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan and the Regional Refugee Response Plan (January 2024)," ReliefWeb, January 15, 2024, https://www.reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-summary-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-and-regional-refugee-response-plan-january-2024.

in the provided aid in the second half of 2023,[4] which could indicate a slow transition to internal state affairs or elections and regional alliances to ensure a safe environment for any possible upcoming conflicts, as there are increased tensions all over the world.

Just as in the case of the Republic of Korea, which rebuilt itself from scratch after the Korean War, Ukraine will have to continue developing its military capabilities with the help of the global community in order to deter future threats and risks. However, there should be active cooperation between Ukraine and other states that are willing to help the country's reconstruction in a sense that does not leave any room for doubt and speculations on "what is the real reason behind that country's support for Ukraine" and so on. Another issue is concluding the war, without leaving any room for a frozen conflict, a simple peace agreement over treaties or a mutual non-aggression agreement between the two countries. On a regional level, the war seems to open new horizons in terms of bolstered security capabilities, pushing the EU to consider establishing its own military power and continuing to develop the Green Deal strategies to ensure a sustainable life even during unfortunate natural disasters or aggressions like the one we are facing now. In this regional perspective, there is a focus on the conclusion of the war, where Ukraine comes out as the winner, not giving in to Russian pressure and threats. However, on a global level, certain influential actors might push for a conclusion of the war through negotiations and diplomatic talks, either bilateral or multilateral, leading to a less favourable decision for Ukraine, in the event of the return of former President Trump to office.

We can clearly see that Ukraine has what it takes to recover quickly as a nation following the Russian aggression, however, with its own resources, it is quite difficult to make a sustainable recovery, which indicates that there is a need for global cooperation to maintain the international trading partners in place and develop the investment capabilities. Europe has to come up with a greater plan to strengthen the capabilities of the European Union without relying too much on the U.S., as there seems to be a clash in perspectives regarding NATO and the situation in Ukraine, as followed by former President Trump's comments on encouraging Russia to invade NATO members, which are, in his view, "delinquent" member states.[5] Even with a non-favourable change in the presidency or foreign policy in the West, Ukraine will have to continue asking for military supplies in terms of aircraft, air-defence missiles, and armament due to its inability to produce them in Ukraine or in neighbouring countries, limiting the options for Ukraine to take a decision that is best in the country's interest and the future of Europe. However, on a positive note, there could be positive implications after the U.S. elections if Nikki Haley is elected instead of former President Trump, bolstering the ties with the EU and NATO on military capabilities and a possible formation of the EU military, which can have a positive, long-lasting impact on opening new horizons in European space.

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[4] Kiel Institute, "Ukraine Support Tracker - A Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine," December 7, 2023, https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support -tracker/.

[5] Vanessa Gera, "Fact-Checking Trump's Comments Urging Russia to Invade 'delinquent' NATO Members," PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, February 12, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/fact-checking-trumps- comments-urging-russia-to-invade-delinquent-nato-members.

The Global Cooperation and Reconstruction Needs

The necessity of global cooperation in reconstructing Ukraine in the post-war period is crucial to maintain a sense of security and stability in the Eastern European neighbourhood by providing enough financial help to rebuild the infrastructure and address the immediate needs of the front-line communities and the displaced population, as well as collaborating with experts around the world, which can improve the expertise and technical support in public health, engineering, and governance. Ukraine shows that they have political stability and is open to cooperating and engaging in international collaborations with other democratic states, which makes the post-reconstruction process not only easier but sustainable for the following years and allows a joint decision on conflict resolution regarding the security of Europe. In an overly positive scenario where Russia is defeated, we could have an agreement on non-aggression between Russia and Ukraine, to ensure strict prevention of the resurgence of aggression in European space, however, this would be possible only if multilateral talks are being conducted, where the Republic of Moldova is also sitting at the negotiation table. Romania and Poland play a huge role in ensuring regional stability for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, as they can eliminate cross-border issues and challenges in promoting trade and economic growth in Ukraine.

For active cooperation without any ulterior motives, it is important to avoid a false sense of security or a Maginot line and go for a long-term process that addresses material and non-material damages caused by the conflict, improving the military through the restoration of law and order, improving economic and social conditions through justice and reconciliations, as well as development and rehabilitation, and, most importantly, the political aspect, which seems to be on the right path in Ukraine.

Another aspect which needs to be taken into consideration is that Ukraine's governmental institutions are still in place and the post-war period will be favourable for the global community as Ukraine will be able to continue to deliver basic services to the civilian population and implement long-term projects to restore Ukraine and its citizens' future. An important aspect to keep in mind is brainstorming a great variety of scenarios, threats, and risks that need to be assessed before another conflict or war breaks out. Why? We see there is a great need for diplomatic negotiators who can at least delay further conflicts or even achieve long-lasting peace for the two countries.

Reconstruction in Ukraine will play an important role in preserving both Europe's democratic society and security structure. An independent, democratic Ukraine is necessary for the economic, security, and peace of Europe and as a reminder that the European Union needs to step up its game to establish military personnel and capabilities to assess any possible risk and threat and be prepared to defend itself and the members of the EU in case of any unfortunate events. As the nation starts to restore vital infrastructure, it is critical that this process begins way before the conflict is over.

Now, the Russian aggression in Ukraine has brought significant changes in the global cooperation between countries, which were not necessarily in the scenario of the decision-making process of the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. For example, we have countries like

Japan, Australia, and South Korea joining the reconstruction plans[6] and delivering major military, financial, and humanitarian aid for Ukraine, as well as a plan to improve the national system to bring reinforced military capabilities and joint military exercises alongside NATO member states that can provide assistance. Most likely, Ukraine will focus on sustainable and innovative ways to reconstruct the national systems, and that will be done with the help of Japan and South Korea, which do not have any elections coming up next year. This could be of great help since the two mentioned countries are continuing to develop their artificial intelligence solutions and technologies to make the process of recovery a fast one. The post-war reconstruction should be sustainable, based on the digital technologies that have been developed lately and most importantly, a transparent reconstruction, eliminating any speculations and disputes between the member states that will offer support to Ukraine later on.

On February 1, an agreement was reached among EU member states to send more financial support to Ukraine between 2024 and 2027, which amounts to around EUR 50 billion, of which EUR 17 billion comes from grants given by EU member states.[7] The package is meant to help Ukraine function on economic and social levels, allowing post-war reconstruction to happen at a faster pace and continuing the process of integrating Ukraine into European projects and the future of Europe.

It is quite interesting how the nations will cooperate in the reconstruction of Ukraine in the event of a cease-fire in the following months due to the elections, which are going to shift the focus to national interests and issues rather than international affairs. It is already 2024 and the likelihood of having all these nations actively involved in whatsi happening in Ukraine is slowly decreasing. It is worrisome for sure, but having that in mind, Ukraine might want to rush the decision-making process to conclude the war, even if that would mean giving up some territories to the aggressor. I am not saying this is the best decision, because it is obviously not, but it might be the fastest. But then, why did Ukraine fight for almost two years if they were going to give their territories to Russia? Why would they give their aggressor what they want if they have come so far, and the damage has already been done? That is because this is the only way to reconstruct the country? The country has been damaged due to the war, but through this war, President Zelensky managed to start the negotiations and talks for joining NATO and the EU. But still, the aggressor could be satisfied with the conclusion of the war and come back later to ask for more territory. Would that not give a false sense of security if Ukraine gives President Putin what he wants? There are many questions that can be easily answered but there is always room for speculation and scenarios that, in the end, good or bad, will prevail, setting the scene for the future of the Ukrainian people and their national identity.

The Future of Ukraine

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[6] Statista, "Key Trade Partners of Ukraine 2022," Statista Research Department, October 5, 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1297572/ukraine-trade-revenue-by-country/.

[7] Zaken, Ministerie van Buitenlandse, "Ukraine: €50 Billion in Extra Support from the European Union," *News Item | Government of the Netherlands*, February 6, 2024, https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2024/02/06/ukraine-50-billion-euros-in-extra-support-from-the-european-union.

It is obvious that Ukraine will need and be grateful for any assistance and financial aid given with the conclusion of the war, however, it is important when it will happen and under what policies and state leaders these elements will be handed in for the reconstruction of the country. In the best-case scenario, Ukraine would push to end the war before the summer of 2024 to avoid losing all attention to the elections that take place in the second half of this year. Of course, this would be a case where either Ukraine does not back down and continues to defend its territories, or Russia faces pressure from within the country, in the case of uprisings and massive revolts against the government's decisions to push for committing more war crimes. Russia could also have a split focus on its war in Europe and the escalating tensions and provocations of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the Peninsula, which can bring the U.S. military forces closer to Russian borders in case of an armed conflict that does not stop on the Korean Peninsula and goes beyond to serve a "greater" purpose to keep China under constant surveillance. This would be the case where the war continues into the second part of the year and President Donald Trump comes into office as the next president of the U.S.; however, this scenario seems to be a bit exaggerated due to preparations made for coordinating security and defence policies by the Republic of Korea's Deputy Defence Minister Cho Chang Rae and U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant of Defence Vipin Narang to brace for the potential outcome of the 2024 elections, where former President Trump succeeds in making his way back into the presidential office.[8] Signing the Nuclear Consultative Group between the two allies would eliminate or at least diminish the 2024 scenario where Russia would have to split its attention between the war in Europe and the potential war in Asia, where the situation would force President Putin to take drastic decisions in terms of Russia's foreign policy and to re-evaluate the pros and cons regarding its alliance with certain countries like the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

There seems to be no room for a cease-fire where Ukraine gives its territories to the aggressor or a case in which a frozen conflict is agreed upon, judging by the responses given by Ukrainians at the end of 2023, because it would mean that in both cases, Russia will either want to push for another war to take over the entire Ukraine to establish its influence across Europe or to push for taking back the territories not occupied in this war. As reported by *Nikkei Asia,* the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology conducted a poll between 29 September 2023 and 9 October 2023, which concluded that around 80% of people in Ukraine are against giving up their territory, even if that would mean continuing the war in the following year.[9] As seen in the poll results, there is no doubt that Ukrainians will push until the very end to conclude the war in their favour, however, this will come with global implications and a need for sustainable aid to support Ukraine's decision to defeat Russia. The decisions of the global community should support the Ukrainian government in dealing with the Russian aggressor because the war in Ukraine is not only affecting the country, but it threatens the security and

[8] Lee Hyo-jin, "Allies Sign Nuclear Framework to Brace for Potential Trump Return," *The Korea Times*, February 14, 2024, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/ 02/113_368799.html.
[9] Hiroyuki Akita, "How Ukraine Can Win the War against the Russian 'Goliath'," *Nikkei Asia*, December 23, 2023, https://www.asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Comment/How-Ukraine-can-win-the-war-against-the-Russian-Goliath.

stability of the entire world, having more and more implications in Europe as there seems to be no progress in reaching out to the Russian people who could make a change in their own country, overturning the government. The future of Ukraine will not only change the perspective the world has on security orders, but it will also strengthen the military capabilities of each country and bolster alliances within the pro-Western countries. This should be a collective struggle to reach the partial or full containment of Russia in the following period, without shifting attention from one matter to the other and without concluding the already ongoing conflicts in the region. This could once again depend on what each member state can do to help Ukraine and ensure there are no negative implications following the next security order, leaving room for more aggression due to unsolved conflicts.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of Ukraine following the war serves as an excellent example of the vital role that international collaboration plays in tackling the many issues that confront a country coming out of war. Rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, maintaining political stability, and advancing social cohesion have all greatly benefited from the unified efforts of the global community, which have included financial help, technical assistance, humanitarian relief, and diplomatic support. The path to recovery emphasizes how intertwined all countries are and how everyone has a stake in promoting peace and prosperity. Sustained international collaboration is still necessary as Ukraine moves forward with its rebuilding in order to guarantee the country's resilience and sustainability and to create an atmosphere that will allow the nation's people to realize their dreams and the war's wounds to heal.

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Türkiye's Energy Strategies and Policies in the Black Sea: Neo-Ottomanism in the Context of the War in Ukraine and the 2023 Elections

Anamaria-Florina Caloianu

Abstract: Türkiye faces both challenges and opportunities in the Black Sea region, where it aims to establish itself as a regional power and play a mediating role in conflicts like the ongoing war in Ukraine. The Grain Deal pursued in 2022 initially fuelled Turkish officials' optimism about maintaining their mediator role. However, despite hosting multiple official talks, Türkiye's ambiguous responses to the conflict are causing Ukrainian and Russian officials to develop a growing sense of resentment towards the country.

Keywords: Century of Türkiye, Red Apple, Neo-Ottomanism, Turkish Drone, Drone Diplomacy

On July 24, 2023, Türkiye commemorated the centennial of the international acknowledgment of the Republic as the successor to the Ottoman Empire. Despite internal transformations shaping the Republic's intricate structure since the Treaty of Lausanne, a consistent figure has remained predominant in the country's ruling elite for the past two decades: President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan obtained another mandate, securing over 52% of the vote, marking his leadership as one of the most enduring in the region with a third renewal of his term.

This paper aims to provide a snapshot of Türkiye's present policies following the 2023 presidential elections and preceding the 2024 local elections. It considers the leadership's new discursive approach, infused with the celebration of the centenary. The primary focus areas include elections, the evolving discourse on the Century of Türkiye, energy policies, and drone diplomacy. The main sources for constructing these points of interest will be recent legal documents, articles, and books.

This article does not constitute an extensive study but rather a compilation of observations regarding Türkiye's current position on the mentioned topics, as well as noteworthy trends amid the upheaval in the Black Sea region. While it is premature to predict Türkiye's actions in the region, one can anticipate that the current administration, now more relaxed post-elections, will concentrate on a stabilization period until the upcoming local elections. This strategy aims to alleviate concerns among citizens still reflecting on the country's economic situation.

In 2023, an important landmark in Erdoğan and AKP's strategy, the economic situation could barely hold up to the dream of the Century of Türkiye in the world - the emphasis on low interest rates to combat inflation faces substantial criticism from economists who argue that official records, such as the April data indicating a 42% inflation rate, are inaccurate. They contend that these figures are employed as a diversionary tactic, steering attention away from the broader economic crisis.

Additionally, stringent control over the transfer of foreign currency by companies and

other unconventional measures aimed at stabilizing the lira create an illusion of improvement that is unsustainable. This approach is anticipated to lead to worker dissatisfaction as the economic reality becomes apparent. The significance of the February earthquake should not be overlooked, as it shifted the domestic attention and deterred potential tourists from considering Türkiye as a holiday destination for the year. The weariness and the hope for a different direction with the election of the contender were particularly evident in urban areas.

Regarding the general elections, numerous perspectives have circulated, questioning whether a renewed Erdoğan mandate truly aligns with the public's interests. Many have embraced a narrative of change, contending that Türkiye is experiencing a weariness with the current establishment, fuelled by economic challenges and a more assertive state management.

While some have misinterpreted the results as a significant challenge to Erdoğan, a broader view reveals that dissatisfaction in urban areas and within the opposition has remained consistent, contributing to the country's internal divisions. Despite this, a substantial portion of the population still places trust in Erdoğan, viewing his continued leadership in both domestic and international affairs as a steadfast and reliable constant.

The Anatolian voters still find him a stable figure in contrast to the ones in the city because their economic standing is not as impacted by volatile turmoil; the economic challenges and unconventional measures are seen by many as Erdoğan's efforts to counter perceived Western interference in Türkiye's economy and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

Another perspective, proposed by Soner Cagaptay, the renowned director of the Turkish Research Programme at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, envisions Erdoğan's continued significance post-coup, outlining three potential scenarios: a shift toward complete authoritarianism, a continuation of polarizing policies, or the unsettling possibility of a civil war outbreak.[1]

The victory of the presidential elections was regarded as being an item on Erdoğan's agenda as the leader immediately focused on the next elections - the local ones in order to secure the current administration's power as Alper Coşkun suggests: "During his victory speech on the eve of the presidential runoff, he was far from ready to relax and call it a day. Instead, he promptly identified the local elections as his next target and used the opportunity to galvanize his base and party cadres for the challenge."[2]

The local elections are significant due to the cleavage of support for the current ruling party throughout the country: the urban areas are getting further away from Erdoğan's ideals. It's important to note that the current administration has been in place for a long period of the time, which led to the creation of a large base of connections among local supporters and people with various levels of power and influence, these people have been regarded by the Turkish leadership as being the carriers of their ideals in the local realm, and by losing the support of the urban areas, the investments made in this base of connections would become obsolete if not taking advantage of as soon as possible. Notably, a sizable portion of Türkiye's youth

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[1] Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey,* London: I.B. Tauris, 2017, pp. 9-10.

[2] Alper Coşkun, "Erdoğan's Next Fight," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 1, 2023, https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/01/erdo-s-next-fight-pub-89873.

envisions a markedly different homeland—one that champions freedom and self-expression.[3]

The importance of the following elections is also related to a historical aspect:[4] Erdoğan lost the support of the Ottoman capital - Istanbul, therefore the discourse of the centenary and the revival of Ottoman grandeur and heritage would become an empty shell with Istanbul going through protests or political turmoil.

Author Alper Coşkun also presents an assessment of the months prior to the March 2024 local elections: "Erdoğan cannot afford such a scenario before local elections, so he will likely do three things. First, he will seek additional funds from his reliable partners, such as Russia, Qatar, and the Gulf states. Second, he will refrain from deliberately confronting the West or acting like a disruptive power in the hopes of luring overseas investment and new lines of credit. Finally, he will concurrently introduce some semblance of normalcy to his economic management, which has failed to address inflation while increasing the country's risk premiums and scaring away foreign capital."[5]

President Erdoğan has extended an invitation to embrace a new strategy ahead of the elections, urging the population to collaborate with the current administration to shape a transformative era in Turkish politics. He articulated the vision of establishing a concept of social justice grounded in full equality of opportunity and fairness, marking the Century of Türkiye.

The centenary alongside the recent victory cemented new coordinates in Erdoğan's political discourse in relation to Türkiye's standing in the international community - the ***Kizil Elma*** or ***Red Apple*** or ***New Red Apple*** is an evocative symbol coming from nomadic origins but in the eyes of the masses it has a clear connotation and more clearly a promise of conquest, as Christiana Erotokritou addresses it in her article for NewEurope.eu isn't solely a foreign affairs approach but a domestic strategy as well: "Erdoğan's aggressiveness and his dreams of a modern-day Ottoman Empire, complete with images of armoured Turkic warriors who are dreaming of conquering Vienna and Rome, is not only evident in Turkey's foreign policy and its relations with neighbouring countries, but in the way that Erdoğan's government deals with anyone that disagrees with his autocratic stance within the country itself. Over the years, he has imprisoned thousands of journalists, academics, civil servants, opposition and human rights activists, Kurds, and judges."[6]

The Century of Türkiye, the symbolism of the Red Apple, and the appeal for unity and reform encapsulated in the re-election of the current leader indicate an already established approach in Turkish internal and foreign policy, embodying the more distinct image of Neo-Ottomanism.

Neo-Ottomanism is a term employed to characterize Türkiye's foreign policy and

[3] Martin Makaryan, "Turkey's Young People Wonder What's Next As Erdoğan Starts Another Term," Inkstickmedia.com, July 28, 2023, https://inkstickmedia.com/turkeys-young-people-wonder-whats-next-as-erdogan-starts-another-term/.
[4] Soli Özel, "Turkey's Municipal Elections: A Political Game Changer?," Institut Montaigne, April 12, 2019, https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/turkeys-municipal-elections-political-game-changer.
[5] *Ibidem.*
[6] Christiana Erotokritou, "Erdogan's 'Red Apple," *NewEurope.eu*, September 10 2020, https://www.neweurope.eu/article/erdogans-red-apple/.

geopolitical orientation in the 21st century. It implies a revival or resurgence of elements linked to the historical Ottoman Empire, a substantial and influential empire that endured for centuries across the Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans, Middle East, and North Africa.

The concept of Neo-Ottomanism has been debated and discussed in academic and policy circles, and it continues to be a topic of analysis and discussion in international relations.

The concept remains up to interpretation in regards to a clear cut definition, even though the Serbian diplomat Darko Tanasković intended to describe it in his book as a complex macro-ideological platform and "the anchor of a specific identity, an independent system of values and an individual harmonized vision"[7], alongside these definitions he includes the aspect of conquering which encapsulated the heritage of the Ottoman Empire and also provides shelter in a shared past and sense of identity.

When examining Neo-Ottomanism, it's crucial to delve into its key features concerning Turkish foreign policy. Firstly, there's a pursuit of regional influence, with Türkiye aiming to play a more assertive role in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans. Secondly, Türkiye has demonstrated a keen interest in engaging in mediation efforts during international crises, exemplified by its involvement in negotiations such as the JCPOA and the Ukraine Grain Deal. Thirdly, there's a desire to explore economic opportunities and establish trade agreements with countries in the former Ottoman sphere of influence. Fourthly, there's an ongoing commitment to developing soft power, evident in Türkiye's investments in promoting its culture, language, and influence through channels like media and cultural diplomacy. Lastly, there's a focus on providing support for Turkic and Muslim communities by advocating for the rights and interests of these populations in the region, including support in conflict zones.

Advocates of Neo-Ottomanism see it as a proactive and constructive foreign policy approach, whereas critics perceive it as a manifestation of expansionism or a revival of historical imperialism. Türkiye's foreign policy is intricate, shaped by diverse factors such as regional dynamics, security considerations, economic interests, and its interactions with international organisations like NATO and the European Union.

The primary critique of this perspective is that it resurrects a vision previously propagated by states perceiving Türkiye as a disruptive presence in the region. This criticism hinges on the notion that the country is accused of harbouring an imperialist agenda, persisting in a significant role in the region despite lacking comparable military and economic influence.

Neo-Ottomanism echoes the Ottoman past, potentially offering a guiding vision for current Turkish foreign policy. However, its implementation faces challenges due to its idealistic nature. The proximity to former Ottoman territories is not rooted in a shared regional vision but rather pragmatic considerations, including economic and energy-related factors. Türkiye remains a pivotal point in the competition among Great Powers and a crucial hub for energy routes.

Regarding its advantageous geographic position, Türkiye has actively pursued energy strategies in the Black Sea region to bolster its energy security and diminish reliance on

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[7] Darko Tanasković, *De la neo-otomanism la Erdoganism: Doctrina și Practica Politicii Externe a Turciei* (From neo-Ottomanism to Erdoganism: Turkey's Foreign Policy Doctrine and Practice), Suceava: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2017, p. 36.

imported energy resources. These strategies encompass multiple facets, including hydrocarbon exploration and production, infrastructure development, and collaboration with both regional and international partners. The following are key elements of Türkiye's energy strategies in the Black Sea:

1. Regarding hydrocarbon exploration and production: Türkiye has initiated efforts to explore and extract hydrocarbons in the Black Sea, as it is believed to hold significant natural gas reserves. The Turkish state-owned energy company, TPAO (Türkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı), plays a crucial role in offshore exploration and drilling activities in the Black Sea. The most significant recent success was an onshore one - the discovery of one billion barrels of oil in the southeast province of Sirnak[8] in May 2023. The country has expectations concerning the Sakarya gas field discovered in August 2020, as the country holds 100% interest in the block and expects to produce around 30% of the domestic gas demands.[9]
2. Türkiye has progressed in fostering partnerships with global energy firms, aiming to harness their expertise and technology for offshore drilling and exploration ventures in the Black Sea. The country's strategy includes engaging in licensing rounds and forming joint ventures with international energy companies to expedite exploration and production activities.
3. The development in the Black Sea energy sector couldn't advance without the development of infrastructure to support the activities: offshore platforms, drilling rigs, and onshore facilities for the processing and transportation of hydrocarbons. The most recent acquisition of a Brazilian platform by TPAO reflects Türkiye's intentions of making the most out of Sirnak's oil reserves: "The platform will process raw gas from the depths of the Black Sea, conduct processing operations in the middle of the sea and transport the processed gas to the shore through the pipeline systems."[10]
4. Maintaining consistent involvement with neighbouring countries has been a key aspect of Türkiye's foreign policy concerning energy resources. Türkiye has actively pursued diplomatic and economic ties with Black Sea nations like Russia, Ukraine, and Bulgaria to encourage collaboration within the energy sector. Being part of regional energy initiatives, including the Southern Gas Corridor, and nurturing energy partnerships with adjacent nations align with Türkiye's strategy to establish a secure and interconnected energy market in the region.
5. Türkiye has shown interest in diversifying its energy sources to reduce its reliance on natural gas imports from other countries, such as Russia and Iran. In seeking cooperation with other global energy firms, the Turkish energy firm Margun Enerji sought Partner EGS and Huawei to integrate a two-megawatt-hour capacity battery

[8] Reuters, "Turkey Discovers 1 bln Barrels of Oil in Southeast Field," May 4, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL1N3710DC/.
[9] Offshore Technology, "Sakarya Gas Field Development, Black Sea, Turkey," February 2, 2023, https://www.offshore-technology.com/projects/sakarya-gas-field-development-black-sea-turkey/?cf-view.
[10] Bariș Șimșek, "Türkiye Acquires Giant Floating Platform to Process Black Sea Gas," *Daily Sabah*, November 20, 2023, https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/turkiye-acquires-giant-floating-platform-to-process-black-sea-gas.

energy storage system into its solar power plant (SPP) located in western Türkiye[11].

Therefore, regarding energy strategies, Türkiye made some consistent advancement in the last years, as the war in Ukraine showcased the fragility of the pre-existing order in which many countries in the region were importers of Russian gas. The current leadership has a strong plan in mind to reduce the energy dependent tendencies, by focusing on the new discoveries of gas and the infrastructure needed to extract resources onshore and offshore.

The last aspect intended in this study is the relation between Türkiye and drone diplomacy - the country is a producer of drones that gained international recognition in this field due to the utilization of Turkish drones in recent armed conflicts such as the one in Ukraine.

The term “drone diplomacy” refers to the utilization of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in the context of international relations and foreign policy. This concept encompasses diverse facets of drone technology and its influence on diplomatic and geopolitical dynamics.

The most common use of drones is for surveillance and intelligence-gathering purposes. They can provide real-time data on a wide range of activities, including military movements, border security, and infrastructure development.

The use of drones in conflicts is increasing due to the asymmetric costs, they are used for targeted strikes that require a quick response and little military personnel while having the capacity of inflicting considerable damage. Owning advanced drone technology has the potential to augment a nation’s influence in international relations. The perceived threat posed by drone capabilities can be employed as a means of diplomatic leverage.

Author Erik Lin-Greenberg reflects upon the technological marathon taking place currently and the development of drones producing countries in the international arena, as this activity propelled countries such as Türkiye and Iran into different dynamics with great powers and their neighbours: “A new era of arms trade is emerging, in which new exporters such as Iran and Turkey are displacing traditional weapons suppliers and are using drone exports to extend influence beyond their borders. These exports threaten Washington’s influence and the security of its partners. To keep ahead, U.S. policymakers should help allies build drone programmes while developing approaches to counter the threat of rival drones.”[12] The author’s observations hold significance, particularly in the context of countries considered pariah states by Western powers now supplying military weaponry to non-Western-supported factions in ongoing conflicts. As a state assumes the role of an international merchant, various actors stand to gain by acquiring arms without any attached conditions.

The deployment of drones in conflicts like the war in Ukraine has diminished the element of surprise in attacks, thanks to continuous surveillance and the involvement of new technologies in tracking subtle movements on the battlefield.

The dynamics of warfare are evolving, with advancements closely monitored, leading

[11] Zeynep Conkar, “Turkish Energy Companies and Huawei Join Forces for Energy Storage Project,” TRT, November 24, 2023, https://www.trtworld.com/turkiye/turkish-energy-companies-and-huawei-join-forces-for-energy-storage-project-15956734.

[12] Erik Lin-Greenberg, “The Dawn of Drone Diplomacy,” Centre for a New American Security, December 20, 2023, https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/the-dawn-of-drone-diplomacy.

to quicker counter-responses. This transformation reflects a scenario reminiscent of a chessboard, where the involved parties are supported not only by military strategies but also by technology giants and shareholders.

Author Franz-Stefan Gady relates this changing nature to a transparent battlefield in which one a move is detected via surveillance technology a response is crafted immediately through artillery rounds, missiles, and suicide drones thus achieving a breakthrough has become an exceedingly challenging endeavour to sustain.[13]

Many view the war in Ukraine as a process of erosion, marked by prolonged and strenuous efforts on both sides to make advancements. The deployment of technology plays a crucial role in intensifying this erosion, as the actions on the ground are significantly influenced by the information gathered through surveillance. This integration of technology not only shapes the dynamics of the conflict but also underscores the enduring and wearing nature of the ongoing struggle.

Turkish-made drones have showcased sophisticated capabilities and have been effectively employed in diverse military and security operations. Noteworthy examples of Turkish drones encompass:

1. Bayraktar TB2: One of Türkiye's most recognized and extensively employed drones is the Bayraktar TB2, manufactured by the Turkish defence company Baykar. The TB2 is an armed, medium-altitude, long-endurance drone equipped with the capacity to deploy precision-guided munitions. Its applications span a spectrum of military operations, encompassing surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeted strikes. The drone became the "mockingjay" of Ukraine in the on-going conflict with Russia, as it became the symbol of the underdog striking back its broader enemy. The initial success of the drone has been explained by expert in AI and unnamed systems Samuel Bendett for Breaking Defence as follows: "TB2 was a successful drone at the early stages of the war when the Russian military's air defence and EW [electronic warfare] was relatively disorganised. It was also a very helpful weapon for competing in the information space against the Russian invasion, with strike videos shared widely on social media,"[14] thus emphasizing the constant reinvention of the conflict due to the technologies used.
2. Anka: The Anka, developed by the Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), is a medium-altitude, long-endurance drone specifically crafted for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and target acquisition missions. It possesses the capability to transport a variety of payloads, including electro-optical and infrared sensors, synthetic aperture radar, and other mission-specific equipment. The launch of the ANKA-3 in the last days of 2023 was a long-awaited dream come true, due to delays.
3. Akıncı: The Akıncı, an advanced armed drone created by Baykar, is engineered for high-altitude, long-endurance missions. Its versatile design enables it to carry a diverse

[13] Franz-Stefan Gady, "How an Army of Drones Changed the Battlefield in Ukraine," Centre for a New American Security, December 6, 2023, https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/how-an-army-of-drones-changed-the-battlefield-in-ukraine.
[14] Agnes Helou, "With Turkish Drones in the Headlines, What Happened to Ukraine's Bayraktar TB2s?," BreakingDefence.com, October 6, 2023, https://breakingdefence.com/2023/10/with-turkish-drones-in-the-headlines-what-happened-to-ukraines-bayraktar-tb2s/.

array of munitions, making it well-suited for a range of military applications. The Ukrainian administration has made some declaration about the need to construct Bayraktar Akinci drones in Ukraine in a facility reserved for this activity - the Akıncı drones are an updated version of the existing drones as the UAV is outfitted with electronic support systems, dual satellite communication systems, air-to-air radar, anti-collision radar, and synthetic aperture radar. This drone is versatile for both air-to-ground and air-to-air attacks since it can carry mini-munitions, bombs, and missiles.[15] It is rumored that this drone would be the first in the world to carry an AESA radar.[16]

4. Karayel: The Vestel Karayel serves as a tactical drone system utilized by the Turkish Armed Forces to conduct surveillance, reconnaissance, and intelligence gathering. Its deployment extends to both military and security operations.

These Turkish drones have been used in various military conflicts, including in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh. They have demonstrated their effectiveness in providing real-time intelligence, surveillance, and precision strike capabilities. Turkish defence companies have also exported these drones to other countries, contributing to Türkiye's growing influence in the global drone market.

Drones are emblematic of the ongoing technological race, as countries that manufacture these unmanned aerial vehicles become entangled in conflicts, exemplified by the situation in Ukraine. This competition involves not only the rapid development of new products, but also a struggle for access to raw materials and cutting-edge technology, adding another dimension to the already tense conditions on the ground in the conflict.

The good that comes with the development of drones is rather pushed to the side even though it is more relevant than ever, as drones can be used in humanitarian and disaster response efforts, such as delivering aid, conducting search and rescue missions, and assessing the extent of damage. International cooperation and diplomacy can play a role in facilitating the use of drones for these purposes and helping in these areas in which personnel cannot get through.

In brief, drone diplomacy reflects the evolving nature of statecraft in the 21st century. Advances in unmanned aerial systems technology have introduced new elements and factors into the arena of foreign policy and global affairs. Whether employed for surveillance, military operations, or humanitarian initiatives, drones have the capability to significantly impact diplomatic ties and alter the geopolitical dynamics among nations.

In summary, Türkiye is charting a new course in the Black Sea region by emphasizing energy policies and infrastructure development to diminish dependence. The state is actively pursuing a neutral stance to serve as a mediator in conflicts while capitalizing on opportunities arising from drone production. With the 2023 elections addressed on the current administration's agenda, there is ample space to secure subsequent local elections and leverage

[15] Ukrainian World Congress, "Ukraine May Receive Modernized Bayraktar Drones," October 3, 2023, https://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/ukraine-may-receive-modernized-bayraktar-drones/.

[16] Sakshi Tiwari, "Battle-Testing' Latest Aknici Drones – Turkey Mulls Supplying Deadly Bayraktar UAVs To Ukraine," *The Eurasian Times,* October 3, 2023, https://www.eurasiantimes.com/akinci-drones-turkey-could-battle-test-its-latest-uavs-in-ukraine-baykar/.

the emerging discourse centred on the Century of Türkiye.

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Azerbaijani Natural Gas: The European Union's Dependency on Natural Gas From Nations In Conflict

Nicholas Zalewski

Abstract._While Ukraine has received a lot of attention and support from around the world including the European Union, following Putin's invasion, this has left Armenians wondering why the European Union has not played a central role in the Artsakh (internationally known as Nagorno-Karabakh) crisis. This is a potential result of numerous reasons which will be discussed in this paper including the international status of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia's relationship with Russia, the EU's energy reliance on Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan's dependence on Russia for energy and energy production, and the EU's approach to other independence movements in the South Caucasus.

Keywords: Natural Gas, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, Ethnic Cleansing, EU, Nagorno-Karabakh

Brief Overview of the Start of Ukraine and Armenia Conflicts

Shortly after the invasion of Ukraine started, the European Union made it clear that it condemned Russia and that it would defend the territorial integrity of Ukraine. EU member states have allowed Ukraine civilians to seek temporary refuge from the fighting and the EU and national governments of member states have donated significant amounts of money and weapons to support Ukraine's efforts to defend itself from Russia. The European Union has also passed numerous rounds of sanctions on Russia in an effort to decrease the tax revenue of Russia to pay for its war efforts in Ukraine. These sanctions include eliminating the EU's energy dependency on Russia and instead look to buy energy elsewhere[1].

Looking at Armenia however, there was significantly less media coverage of this situation. There was also no declaration from the European Union that it would stand with Armenians. Even while the European Union has effectively picked a side in the conflict, it still appears to want to avoid speaking about the matter publicly. Even when the European Union had a firmer tone recently with Azerbaijan, it went relatively unnoticed. The difference in tone however is a result of Nagorno-Karabakh's international status.

International Status of Nagorno-Karabakh

For Armenia, the problem regarding Nagorno-Karabakh is that internationally it is recognized as Azerbaijan, and not by Artsakh, the Armenian name for the region. Nagorno-Karabakh was first recognized as part of Azerbaijan in 1923 by the Soviet Union, despite being mainly populated by Armenians. Nagorno-Karabakh was de facto independent as a result of the end of the war in 1994. Despite this, it was not recognized internationally by a single

[1] Tomasz Rokicki, Piotr Bórawski, and András Szeberényi, "The Impact of the 2020–2022 Crises on EU Countries' Independence from Energy Imports, Particularly from Russia," *Energies* 16, no. 18, September 15, 2023, https://doi.org/10.3390/en16186629.

member of the United Nations,[2] nor the European Union. In 2002, the European Union made it clear that it recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. "The European Union confirms its support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and recalls that it does not recognize the independence of Nagorno Karabakh."[3] This excludes the European Union from supporting Armenia in the same way it supports Ukraine.

This is in stark contrast to Crimea, which has been internationally recognized as part of Ukraine since its independence in 1991,[4] regardless of Russia's attempts to declare it part of Russia, including through a severely flawed referendum vote.[5] As the European Union recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan, it makes sense why there was not the same mobilization of weapons to the Armenian national government to protect Artsakh, as has occurred with weapons and funds donated to Ukraine to allow it to defend its internationally recognized territory.

Natural Gas from Azerbaijan

As a consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Union sought to free itself from energy dependence on Russia. While the European Union has publicly stated that it recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijani territory, buying natural gas from Azerbaijan does not just support this nation, but also Russia. In order to stop buying energy directly from Russia, the European Union has to search for alternative nations. Azerbaijan became one of these alternative nations to buy natural gas, and the European Union planned to double its annual importation of natural gas from Azerbaijan by 2027.[6]

The issue with buying oil from Azerbaijan is that Lukoil, a company responsible for the extraction of the oil and transporting it to Europe, is a Russian company. This means even if the European Union were to ignore the complicated situation of Nagorno-Karabakh, it is still supporting Russia financially. In 2019, Lukoil paid 200 billion dollars[7] in taxes and claimed it is amongst the three companies that pay the most taxes in Russia. As a result, the European Union is failing to achieve its goal of ridding itself of energy dependence on Russia as it is impossible to buy natural gas from Azerbaijan without still contributing tax dollars to the Russian government. It is impossible to know how these tax dollars are used specifically but the issue is that by providing additional tax revenue for the Russian government, President Vladimir Putin allows to have more funds to potentially use to pay for his invasion of Ukraine.

[2] Svante E. Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1999.

[3] European Council, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the European Union," October 11, 2020, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/11/nagorno-karabakh-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union/.

[4] Doris Wydra, "The Crimea Conundrum: The Tug of War Between Russia and Ukraine on the Questions of Autonomy and Self-Determination," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* vol. 10, no. 2/2003, pp. 111–30, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24675066.

[5] Steven Pifer, Maggie Tennis Strobe Talbott, and Tara Varma, "Five Years after Crimea's Illegal Annexation, the Issue Is No Closer to Resolution," Brookings, March 9, 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/five-years-after-crimeas-illegal-annexation-the-issue-is-no-closer-to-resolution/.

[6] Euronews, "EU Agrees Gas Deal with Azerbaijan," July 18, 2022, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/07/18/von-der-leyen-heads-to-azerbaijan-to-secure-new-gas-import-deal.

[7] Gligor Radečić, "The EU-Azerbaijan Gas Deal Is a Repeat Mistake," POLITICO, August 17, 2022, https://www.politico.eu/article/the-eu-azerbaijan-gas-deal-is-a-repeat-mistake/.

Lukoil announced on February 18, 2022, that it bought 9.99 percent of the interest in the Shad-Deniz gas project from PETRONAS, increasing its total interest in the project to 19.99 percent.[8] As this is less than a week before the invasion of Ukraine, The European Union cannot defend its proposal to double its annual natural gas imports from Azerbaijan on the basis of the deal occurring after the EU's plan was announced. European Commission President Von Der Leyen finished negotiations with Azerbaijani President on July 18th, 2022, exactly five months after Lukoil made its announcement. In her statement published on July 18th, 2022, Von Der Leyen states "The European Union has therefore decided to diversify away from Russia and to turn towards more reliable, trustworthy partners. And I am glad to count Azerbaijan among them."[9] It is questionable how Von Der Leyen can truly consider buying natural gas from Azerbaijan as replacing natural gas from Russia when a Russian company continues to become a larger partner in natural gas production in Azerbaijan.

Besides the issue of Lukoil's involvement in natural gas production, Russia also started to export natural gas to Azerbaijan. This appears to be done in order to help Azerbaijan reach its goal of increasing natural gas exports to the European Union. On November 18th, 2022, Gazprom, a state-owned Russian energy company stated that it would export as much as a billion cubic meters of natural gas to Azerbaijan.[10] While the EU made numerous efforts to stop buying Russian natural gas in order to prevent providing revenue to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, Azerbaijan has helped Russia by purchasing more natural gas. This however should also not be a surprise for the European Union as Russia and Azerbaijan announced that they would have a seasonal cycle of exporting and importing natural gas from one another in 2021. In winter, Russia would export natural gas to Azerbaijan while Azerbaijan would export natural gas to Russia in the summer.[11]

Despite this reality, the European Union did not immediately suspend its purchases of natural gas from Azerbaijan despite the reality that Lukoil pays taxes to the Russian government which in turn can be used to fund Putin's invasion of Ukraine. The European Union however does appear to be hesitant about increasing its purchase of natural gas from Azerbaijan. In order to double the amount of natural gas it is important from Azerbaijan. The pipeline linking Azerbaijan to the European Union would need to be expanded. Part of the European Union's reluctance to cut ties with Azerbaijan is the fact that the European Union has been involved in the southern Gas Corridor project and its effort to secure Azerbaijani natural gas for years now. The project includes even nations; Azerbaijan, Albania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Italy, and Turkey which involves over 3,500 kilometres of pipeline and has

[8] LUKOIL, "Lukoil Completes the Deal on Acquiring Interest in Shah-Deniz Project," February 18, 2022, https://www.lukoil.com/PressCentre/Pressreleases/Pressrelease/lukoil-completes-the-deal-on-acquiring-interest.

[9] European Commission, "Statement by President von Der Leyen with Azerbaijani President Aliyev," July 18, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/statement_22_4583.

[10] Caucasus Watch, "Gazprom to Supply up to 1 Billion Cubic Meters of Gas to Azerbaijan," November 20, 2022, https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/gazprom-to-supply-up-to-1-billion-cubic-meters-of-gas-to-azerbaijan.html.

[11] TASS, "Azerbaijan, Russia Agreed on Seasonal Gas Swap," July 21, 2024, https://tass.com/economy/1318381?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com.

had at least 35 billion dollars invested into the project.[12] This is a significant investment which makes it difficult for EU member states to decide to no longer participate in, considering other factors including rising energy costs since the pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine, domestic debt crises, trying to catch up with wealthier member states, etc. On the other hand, this also means that the European Union is not completely cutting itself off from Russian energy. While the European Union saw Azerbaijan as a source of energy to replace energy imports from Russia, Armenia itself relies on importing energy from Russia. Besides the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh is recognized as part of Azerbaijan internationally, Armenia's reliance on Russia hurts itself from strengthening its relationship with the European Union which continues to try to distance itself from Russia.

Armenia's Relationship with Russia

Another aspect that may have made the European Union disinterested in assisting Armenia is the close relationship Armenia has had with Russia for decades. Currently, Russia is Armenia's most important trade partner. In 2021, Armenia exported 794 million dollars' worth of goods to Russia (26.78 percent of total exports) and imported 1,785 billion dollars' worth of goods[13] (33.53 percent of total imports). While over 80 percent of energy imported by Armenia in 2020 was natural gas, Russia was the source of 87.7 percent of natural gas imports to Armenia.[14] This strong economic independence on Russia makes Armenia vulnerable in the eyes of the European Union.

This relationship has helped Armenia in some ways, yet it hurts the nation and its relationship with the European Union, particularly now. If Armenia wants to eventually put forward an application for candidate status to become a member state of the European Union, having a close relationship with Russia will continue to remain a significant barrier to EU membership.[15] The European Union was created after World War II to avoid violence and instead work together for a better future, but Russia is a direct threat to this as can be seen in Ukraine. President Putin is not interested in solving disputes through diplomacy but rather through war. Armenia will have to decide whether it is committed to joining the European Union and decreasing its dependence on Russia or maintain its relationship with Russia. This will be difficult for Armenia to accomplish considering its energy dependence on Russia and geographic proximity to Russia as well. This may be worthwhile however considering it appears that Russia has plans with Azerbaijan that exclude Armenia. If these plans take place which will be discussed later on in the paper, it would be worthwhile for Armenia to work more closely with the European Union.

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[12] Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), "The Southern Gas Corridor," https://www.tap-ag.com/about-tap/the-big-picture/the-southern-gas-corridor, accessed February 22, 2024.

[13] World Bank, "Armenia Trade," *WITS Data*, https://wits.worldbank.org/CountrySnapshot/en/ARM. accessed February 19, 2024.

[14] IEA, "Overview – Armenia Energy Profile – Analysis," https://www.iea.org/reports/armenia-energy-profile/overview, accessed February 19, 2024.

[15] Aram Terzyan, "Bringing Armenia Closer to Europe? Challenges to the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement Implementation," *Romanian Journal of European Affairs,* vol. 19, no. 1/2019, pp. 97-110, http://rjea.ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/RJEA_vol.19_no.1_June-2019-ARTICOL-7.pdf.

Independence Movements in Georgia

Similar to Nagorno-Karabakh, the European Union does not recognize the movements for independence in South Ossetia or Abkhazia. Instead, both are recognized as part of Georgia and the EU supports Georgia's right to exercise sovereignty over both regions and maintains that Russian troops in the two regions as interference and a disregard of Georgia's sovereignty.[16] Just as is the case with Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were included in Georgia's territory recognized internationally after its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. While Armenians have compared the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to the invasion of Ukraine, it is more realistic to compare the situation to Georgia. Nagorno-Karabakh attempted to declare independence from Azerbaijan similar to South Ossetia and Abkhazia which have tried to become independent from Georgia. All three regions however are still internationally recognized for the most part as part of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Even if Armenians try to compare themselves to Ukraine, the result would not be satisfactory. This is because one of the arguments for some eastern oblasts should become independent of Ukraine and part of Russia because there is a large Russian-speaking population. The European Union has rejected this however and continues to recognize any territory that was part of Ukraine since independent in 1991 as Ukrainian.[17] Just because Nagorno-Karabakh was primarily ethnic Armenians who spoke Armenian, the European Union would not instantly recognize it as part of Armenia just as it has refuted to follow the same principle with Russian-speaking Ukraine. The European Union continues to demonstrate in this manner that it is not interested in dividing nations on the basis of linguistic/ethnic divisions.

Alleged Ethnic Cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh

Rather than stay in Nagorno-Karabakh and see how they would be treated under the rule of Azerbaijan, Armenians have fled to Armenia. In just one week, 80 percent of Armenians fled[18] fearing violence would follow the announcement that Nagorno-Karabakh was being reincorporated into Azerbaijan. The European Parliament of the EU passed a resolution[19] condemning Azerbaijan for ethnic cleansing and suggested that sanctions be put in place in order to punish certain members of the Azerbaijani government and to place the natural gas agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan on hold. The problem is that the other institutions can ignore these suggestions by the European Parliament and for the time being appeared to intend not to take these requirements into consideration. This means that the European Union will continue to buy natural gas from Azerbaijan which will continue to support Russia, detracting from the European Union's goal of also depriving tax revenue from Russia as Lukoil

[16] EEAS, "Local EU Statement on the Situation in Georgia," The Diplomatic Service of The European Union, September 12, 2018, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/50364_en.
[17] Alan Cafruny et al., "Ukraine, Multipolarity and the Crisis of Grand Strategies," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1/June 14, 2022, pp. 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2084881.
[18] Centre for Preventive Action, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict | Global Conflict Tracker," Council on Foreign Relations, January 24, 2024, https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict.
[19] European Parliament, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Meps Demand Review of EU Relations with Azerbaijan: News: European Parliament," Nagorno-Karabakh: MEPs demand review of EU relations with Azerbaijan | News | October 5, 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230929IPR06132/nagorno-karabakh-meps-demand-review-of-eu-relations-with-azerbaijan.

will continue to make money off extracting natural gas in Azerbaijan. Ignoring the European Parliament may also increase backlash for the EU which already faces criticism over a perceived democratic deficit. By ignoring the advice of the only directly elected institution of the European Union, EU citizens may become enraged that the EU seems uninterested in what the only directly elected representatives in the European Union have to say about the situation. The resolution passed by a significant margin, with 401 members of parliament voting in favour, 9 voted against, and 36 abstained.

While the European Union passed this resolution, it is complicated whether or not Armenians fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh can be considered ethnic cleansing as the Azerbaijani government did not order them to leave. Instead, the Azerbaijani government made official statements promising to invest in the region's economy. As the majority of the Armenians already fled before there was evidence that there would be violence or mistreatment of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is impossible to say with certainty that ethnic cleansing would have taken place. While this is the case, it is possible to see how the Azerbaijan government treated the region while it fought to regain control of Nagorno-Karabakh. Vehicle from the Red Cross were not even allowed to use the Lachin Corridor as the Azerbaijani government claimed that unsanctioned goods were hidden inside the Red Cross vehicles.[20] The alleged unsanctioned goods are cell phones, gas, cigarettes, and parts to repair cell phones. This had disastrous results for the mainly Armenian population of the region, as the Lachin Corridor is the sole link which connects Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. While this is not explicit evidence that ethnic cleansing would occur, it is clear that the Azerbaijani government was so concerned about achieving its goal of regaining sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh that it ignored the welfare of civilians. For Armenians who fled, this appeared to be enough of an incentive to flee instead of remaining in the region in order to see how they would be treated once the region is fully integrated into Azerbaijan.

The European Union defines ethnic cleansing as "Rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group, which is contrary to international law."[21] This definition is based on the definition from the United Nations Security Council.[22] The problem with the definition is that it is broad and does not specify what constitutes intimidation. Part of the issue with the vagueness of this definition comes from the reality that ethnic cleansing is a relatively new concept defined since the Yugoslavian civil war, despite other instances that can be classified as ethnic cleansing having occurred before this war. While Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh may have perceived intimidation from Azerbaijan causing them to flee, due to no

[20] Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, "Azerbaijan Suspends Traffic on Sole Road to Nagorno-Karabakh Due to 'Contraband'," July 11, 2023, https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-suspends-traffic-nagorno-karabakh-armenia/32498664.html.

[21] DG HOME, "Ethnic Cleansing," Migration and Home Affairs, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/ethnic-cleansing_en#:~:text=Definition(s),is%20contrary%20to%20international%20law accessed February 22, 2024.

[22] Commission of Experts on the former Yugoslavia, "Final Report of the Commission of Experts," May 27, 1994, https://www.his.com/~twarrick/commxyu1.htm.

elaboration of what is required to occur to be considered intimidation, the final interpretation is up to the European Union.

The reality is that there are concerns that Azerbaijan will not be satisfied with its recent victory in Nagorno-Karabakh. Besides taking back Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenians fear that Azerbaijan may take more land from Armenia that has been internationally recognized as Armenian since independence. Similar to Ukraine, Armenia is not a member of NATO and is vulnerable. This is not just paranoia but reality as Azerbaijan has mentioned "Western Azerbaijan"[23] several times. By this, Azerbaijan does not mean a western region within its current territory but by land previously inhabited in Armenia by Azerbaijanis before they were displaced. What Azerbaijan does not mention when discussing this is that Armenians previously living in Azerbaijan were displaced as well and that displacement of citizens was not a one-sided issue. If this is the case and Azerbaijan does start to attempt to seize territory internationally recognized as Armenian, it is important for the European Union to be firm with Azerbaijan and be prepared to stop purchasing natural gas along with implementing sanctions. The conflict would then become very similar to Russia illegally invading Ukraine and the EU must not sit idly by if this occurs. While the European Union set a firm tone with Russia, the EU must be clear that warfare will not be tolerated in Europe from any nation and not only just target Russia.

Simultaneously, while the European Commission is not convinced that ethnic cleansing has occurred, as of February 13th, 2014, a total of 7.7 million euros[24] has been provided by the European Commission in order to help resettle Armenians who fled Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians will have their own perception of the European Union's response to the conflict, but it is impossible to say that assistance is not being given. This conflict shows the importance of the international recognition of a territory and whether or not the European Union will become involved in an armed conflict.

Azerbaijan has also avoided speaking with the European Union which appears to be part of its strategy to leave its options open to claim more land from Armenia. In early October of 2023, Azerbaijani President Aliyev was supposed to attend a meeting in the EU to ideally find a solution for the conflict with Armenia, yet he pulled out at the last minute.[25] Instead of negotiating in Brussels, the Azerbaijani government wants to try to resolve the situation in Moscow[26] where it feels it stands a better chance of gaining more, particularly if their goal is to expand its conquest into seizing territory recognized as part of Armenia. While Azerbaijan may have originally had some reservations with this approach and potentially thought Russia would intervene in Nagorno-Karabakh to protect Armenians, it did not which proves to

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[23] Vicken Cheterian, "Crisis to Watch 2024: Armenia-Azerbaijan," ISPI, December 22, 2023, https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/crisis-to-watch-2024-armenia-azerbaijan-157858.

[24] UNHCR, "EU Increases Humanitarian Aid to Displaced Karabakh Armenians with €5.5 Million - Armenia," ReliefWeb, February 13, 2024, https://reliefweb.int/report/armenia/eu-increases-humanitarian-aid-displaced-karabakh-armenians-eu55-million.

[25] Mark Trevelyan, "Azerbaijan's Aliyev Pulls out of Talks with Armenia and EU | Reuters," Reuters, October 4, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/azerbaijans-aliyev-skip-eu-talks-with-armenia-angry-with-france-state-media-2023-10-04/.

[26] Vicken Cheterian, "Crisis to Watch 2024: Armenia-Azerbaijan," ISPI, December 22, 2023, https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/crisis-to-watch-2024-armenia-azerbaijan-157858.

Azerbaijan that Russia does not favour Armenians in the conflict. This may be because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine requiring too many resources to act in Nagorno-Karabakh but in the end, it is clear that this region will not become a Russian protectorate. As Russia is attempting to annex oblasts of Ukraine, Azerbaijan may gain more confidence that it will be able to annex Armenian territory as well.

Conclusion

Just as in all other conflicts, innocent civilians lose the most. Sadly, compared to the invasion of Ukraine, the European Union has stayed relatively silent regarding the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This shows that the diplomacy of the European Union and its interest in being a global actor are still limited, along with the difference in conflicts. Despite Azerbaijan's success in regaining sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh, this is very unlikely to be the last of the land that Azerbaijan wants to control. While the European Union may consider the conflict to be different from that of the invasion of Ukraine, the EU must still be prepared for a potential invasion of Armenian territory. The EU must be willing to act swiftly as it did with Russia and punish Azerbaijan by not buying natural gas from Azerbaijan along with implementing sanctions.

While the European Parliament may consider ethnic cleansing to have occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh, the European Commission has not taken any actions based on the resolution passed by the Parliament. Taking into consideration the European Union's definition of ethnic cleansing as well, given its vague language, the voluntary mass-exodus of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh cannot be considered ethnic-cleansing due the region being officially incorporated into Azerbaijan as of January 1st, 2024. This does not condone Azerbaijan's actions such as preventing aid from reaching Nagorno-Karabakh through international organisations like the Red Cross and perceived threats of violence Armenians feared were they to stay, yet it does make it impossible to classify the situation as ethnic cleansing.

The European Union should also re-examine buying natural gas from Azerbaijan due to the role of Lukoil in the production of natural gas, along with existing energy agreements between Russia and Azerbaijan. While the European Union is not buying natural gas directly from Russia, it is clear that it is only possible for Azerbaijan to export natural gas to the European Union as a result of private and governmental support from Russia. Even if the European Union is not interested in doing this for the sake of Armenia, this is important in order to meet its goal of supporting Ukraine by depriving revenue from the Russian government.

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East Meets East: Japan's Strategic Interests in Eastern Europe

Claudiu Bogdan Aldea

Abstract. The study delves into Japan's strategic interests in Eastern Europe, employing the theoretical framework of Social-Constructivism. In doing so, the paper exhibits the significance and importance of ideational factors in shaping international relations. The study attempts to explain how Japan's interests in the region emerge from its status of global actor, seeking to construct a shared security framework. In addition, the paper analyses specific initiatives, such as GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) + Japan and Japan's Caucasus Initiative. While acknowledging various limitations both in structural factors and in Japanese approaches towards the region, the study underscores Japan's meaningful role in fostering rules-based behaviour on the international stage. Consequently, the paper is organised around the following research questions: How does Social-Constructivism inform our understanding of Japan's strategic interests in Eastern Europe? Why is Japan interested in the region? How are the relations between Japan and Eastern Europe evolving? What are the inherent limitations in Japan's pursuit of its strategic interests in Eastern Europe?

Keywords: Japan, Social-Constructivism, Eastern Europe, proactive diplomacy

Introduction

Japan's post-World War II foreign policy has been characterized by a traditional pacifist stance, paired with an economic-focused approach, heavily influenced by its historical experiences. However, the 21st century saw a subtle yet palpable shift in this stance, particularly in how Japan interacts with regions beyond its immediate geographic sphere, such as Eastern Europe. Japan's engagement with this region offers insights into its broader strategic objectives, including its pursuit of global peace and stability. Subsequently, this study attempts to understand Japan's strategic interests in Eastern Europe, a region often overshadowed by more pronounced alliances or more contentious actors in Tōkyō's foreign policy considerations. These objectives are explored through the lens of Social-Constructivism, in order to understand how ideational factors, such as norms and identities, shape and are shaped by Japan's foreign policy strategies.

The paper adopts a mixed methodology, combining qualitative strategies, such as content and discourse analysis, with quantitative data. In doing so, the paper sets forth a series of research questions: How does Social-Constructivism inform our understanding of Japan's strategic interests in Eastern Europe? What dynamics characterize Japan's evolving relations with Eastern Europe? What are the driving forces behind Japan's interests and impact in the region? What are the inherent limitations in Japan's pursuit of its strategic interests in Eastern Europe?

Theoretical Framework

1. What is "Eastern Europe" in this study?

Defining "Eastern Europe" is essential for providing a coherent framework for the paper, as the region's understanding has varied historically and politically. This conceptual complexity is generated by the historical experiences and socio-economic transformations that shaped the region.[1] For the purposes of this research, "Eastern Europe" encompasses the countries of the European Union's (EU) Eastern Partnership (EaP), with the exception of Belarus. Concretely, when we use Eastern Europe in the paper, we refer to Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. This definition is chosen by taking into consideration the level of engagement of these states with Japan (as in the case of Belarus, the relations have not been developed to such an extent). This selection allows for a more focused analysis of Japan's strategic interests in areas where its involvement has been more pronounced. Being at the interplay of other actors on the international stage, such as the EU, the Russian Federation, the United States of America (US) and China, these countries manifest a pronounced strategic significance. Accordingly, this region offers Japan opportunities to expand its diplomatic influence, to extend economic partnerships and to create a shared understanding of security.

2. Social-Constructivism and the Role of Ideational Factors

Social-Constructivism offers an alternative lens of analysing international relations, diverging from traditional theories such as Realism and Liberalism. As traditional theories can be defined as *materialistic*, they put forth the idea that "states have enduring interests such as power and wealth and are constrained in their ability to further those interests because of material forces such as geography, technology and the distribution of power."[2] In comparison, for Social-Constructivism, the international system is not merely influenced by material factors, but also by *ideational* factors, such as beliefs and social elements. In this sense, actors on the international stage not only react to material constraints, but also engage in social interactions. Nonetheless, an ideational perspective does not rule out the importance of interests for actors, but they are developed through social interactions and interpretations. Social-Constructivism gained significant traction towards the end of the Cold-War, given that "the dominant theories failed to capture the major political transformation on the international stage, namely the very dissolution of one of the centres of polarity."[3] Accordingly, the social stage of world politics is not static, changing over time through interactions, discourses, and normative shifts. In this sense, it highlights that ideational factors influence both the stage of international politics, and the way states and other agents act and react. Fundamentally, the research focuses on three key concepts espoused by constructivist thought: *norms, expectations,* and *identities.* To begin with, norms can be understood as "shared expectations about appropriate behaviour held by a community of actors".[4] Being the product of collective social construction, norms

[1] Alan Dingsdale, "Redefining 'Eastern Europe': A New Regional Geography of Post-Socialist Europe?," *Geography,* vol. 84, no. 3/July 1999, p. 204.
[2] Michael Barnett, "Social Constructivism," in John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 8th edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 193.
[3] Laura Maria Herța, *De la Relațiile Româno-Sârbe la Relațiile Româno-Iugoslave. Interpretări Constructiviste* (From Romanian-Serbian Relations to Romanian-Yugoslav Relations. Constructivist Interpretations), Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2012, p. 7 (translation ours).
[4] Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society,* London: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 22.

evolve as the international context and the interactions between actors change. Moreover, norms "shape behaviour by offering ways to organise action rather than specifying the ends of action."[5] Accordingly, they inform and shape how states perceive their identities, interests, and the appropriate behaviour on the international stage. Moving forward, expectations represent an inherent element of norms. Basically, they highlight what constitutes the appropriate behaviour of actors in a given social context. Accordingly, expectations are created, maintained, and also modified through continuous social interactions among international actors. Lastly, identities represent a series of meanings attached to certain actors, which are shaped by cultural, historical, and political elements. For Social-Constructivists, identities are relational, being formed and evolving in relation to "others.".= Consequently, an actor "understands others according to the identity it attributes to them, while simultaneously reproducing its own identity through daily social practice".[6]

Shifting to a more tangible application of these principles, it is important to understand how these theoretical categories capture the evolution of Japan's stance in international relations. Historically, Japan adopted a pacifist stance, deeply rooted in its post-World War II constitution. However, this norm was not just part of the legal framework, but also a fundamental element of Japan's international identity. Consequently, the global community's expectations mirrored this pacifist posture. Japan was often defined as an 'economic giant, but a political dwarf'[7] due to its significant focus on economic and cultural influence as opposed to its political and military role. However, the past fifteen years actually witnessed a paradigm shift in these ideational factors. Foremost, Tōkyō has progressively adopted the norm of *proactive diplomacy*, marking a departure from its historic pacifism, especially noticeable in defence and security matters. The international community now anticipates a more active Japanese engagement in international affairs, particularly in matters of regional stability and security.[8] These shifts actually highlight Japan's redefined identity as a global actor with a more comprehensive role on the international stage.

Japan – East Europe Cooperation: Multilateral Platforms for the Caucasus

1. Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) and Japan

In 2006, the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (AFP) has been introduced as a new strategic horizon of Japanese diplomacy.[9] This strategy was designed to extend Japan's international commitments beyond the regional context, specifically encompassing Eastern Europe. As a new pillar of Japanese foreign policy, the AFP was complemented by *value-oriented diplomacy,* which espoused the promotion of universal values. In this context, the

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[5] Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan*, London: Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 19.
[6] Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security*, vol. 23, no. 1/1998, p. 175, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.23.1.171.
[7] Yee-Kuang Heng, "Shaping the Indo-Pacific? Japan and Europeanisation," LSE Ideas, November 2021, p. 9.
[8] Hiroyuki Suzuki, "Japan's Leadership Role in a Multipolar Indo-Pacific," Centre for Strategic and International Studies, October 2020, p. 1.
[9] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Speech by Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons'," November 30, 2006.

"AFP was one of the few strategies aimed at creating proactive Japanese diplomacy,"[10] showcasing Japan's global responsibilities. Established in 2007, soon after the development of the AFP, the GUAM + Japan Framework formalized Japan's diplomatic and strategic outreach to Eastern Europe. The Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM (now comprising Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) is a regional platform conceived in 1997 and established in its current form in 2006, whose primary objectives are the strengthening of democratic values and the promotion of sustainable development.

The GUAM + Japan format evolved from Japan's traditional approach of extending aid through its Official Development Assistance (ODA) to a more comprehensive and strategic partnership. The establishment of GUAM + Japan highlighted a shift from mere economic assistance to a more nuanced engagement, incorporating political dialogue, stability, and the promotion of democratic values. Accordingly, given GUAM's underlying goals and objectives, "normative compatibility has played a role in determining Japan's engagements in Eastern Europe".[11] This normative compatibility is based on a shared vision, further developed by the establishment of the GUAM-Japan Cooperation Programme in 2015.[12] These guidelines showcase GUAM states' commitment to creating both economic prosperity and political stability in the region. As GUAM pursued its own objectives of fostering democracy, Japan found itself in agreement with such aspirations. Nonetheless, Japan's involvement in the region extends beyond political and ideological alignment, also being influenced by economic and energy interests. As for the practical aspects of cooperation, the major channels for dialogue consisted in a series of high-level meetings starting with 2007. Through these formal interactions, key areas of collaboration had been identified, including promoting democracy, enhancing security, and deepening economic cooperation. Alongside these high-level meetings, a range of workshops were conducted, primarily aimed at sharing knowledge and expertise. A notable example of this took place in 2021, when the Japanese government organised a workshop on customs duties.[13] Despite these efforts, Japan's GUAM initiative has faced challenges. The varying levels of European integration among GUAM countries, their diverse foreign policy objectives and distinct domestic politics have sometimes hindered cohesive action. Additionally, external factors, such as the Russian influence in the region, also pose as significant challenges to the efficiency of this platform. These limitations highlight the complexities Japan faces in navigating diverse political landscapes.

2. Japan's Caucasus Initiative

[10] Karol Zakowski, Beata Bochorodycz, and Marcin Socha, *Japan's Foreign Policy Making: Central Government Reforms, Decision-Making Processes, and Diplomacy*, Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018, p. 118.

[11] Daisuke Kitade, "The Butterfly Effect: Why Does Eastern Europe Matter to Japan?," European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2020, p. 2.

[12] GUAM, "GUAM-Japan Cooperation Programme," Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM, December 3, 2015, https://guam-organisation.org/en/guam-japan-cooperation-programme, accessed January 25, 2024.

[13] *Idem*, "GUAM-Japan Workshop on Customs," Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM, March 19, 2021, https://guam-organisation.org/en/guam-japan-workshop-on-customs/, accessed January 25, 2024.

Similar to GUAM + Japan format, the Caucasus Initiative represents a formalized and structured approach of Japan to engage with the countries in the region, specifically Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Developed in 2018,[14] this initiative was also intended to reflect Japan's broader foreign policy strategy in promoting stability, cooperation, and economic development in Eastern Europe. Fundamentally, Japan has prioritized human resource development and institutional capacity building in these countries. This approach is evident in Japan's support for education programmes, governance reforms and civil society development. This developmental push is also generated by Japan's multi-faceted focus on the region. Specifically, due to Tōkyō's "military constrains it was important to build a platform of cooperation upon which it would later base numerous initiatives for deepening bilateral relations with Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan".[15] Additionally, recognizing the geopolitical importance of the Caucasus, Japan has also invested in infrastructure development and sought to boost business ties. The region's position as a crossroad between Europe and Asia makes it an attractive destination for Japanese investments in sectors like transportation, energy, and technology. A significant element of Japan – Caucasus cooperation is that Tōkyō's policy "has been devoid of conditionality".[16] This means that Japan's engagement in the region has not been tied to strict conditions or demands in exchange for its support. In this logic, however, Japan's traditional posture in the Caucasus has been characterized by a "'low-risk and low-profile'"[17] approach, majorly focused on economic and diplomatic collaboration. While this approach corresponds to Japan's preference for stability, it has fundamentally impacted Japan's capacity to engage in broader strategic dialogues with these states, limiting the depth of bilateral relations. Taking these aspects into consideration, the major achievements of the GUAM + Japan format and the Caucasus Initiative are that of legitimizing Japan's commitment to the rules-based order and transregional cooperation, serving as formal frameworks for Japan's regional priorities within Eurasia.[18] While these initiatives created avenues for political dialogue and enhanced economic and diplomatic engagement, the full potential of such platforms is yet to be realized. Japan's historical low-profile approach, paired with the varying political landscapes and external influences in the Caucasus represent ongoing challenges.

Moldova and Ukraine in Japan's Foreign Policy Horizons

Moldova and Ukraine have emerged as significant actors within the framework of Japanese foreign policy strategies. Japan has extended the bilateral relations beyond the depth of its engagement with the Caucasus states. Over the past five years, Japan's commitment to the region has seen a deepening of relations through various strategic initiatives.

1. Japan – Moldova – Expanding Partnership

[14] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Extraordinary Press Conference by Foreign Minister Taro Kono," September 5, 2018.
[15] Emil Avdaliani, "Political and Economic Interests of Japan in South Caucasus: Perspectives of Cooperation," *Modern Diplomacy*, February 1, 2020, https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/02/02/political-and-economic-interests-of-japan-in-south-caucasus-perspectives-of-cooperation/.
[16] Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Japan's Policy towards the South Caucasus: Pragmatic Even If Enigmatic," *Asia Europe Journal* vol. 15, no. 1/2016, p. 64, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10308-016-0462-1.
[17] *Ibidem,* p. 58.
[18] Kitade, *art. cit.*, p. 2.

The recent years have seen an enhancement in Japan's foreign policy towards Moldova, aligning with Japan's global commitments and proactive diplomacy. This shift is evident in the series of engagements and initiatives undertaken by Japan towards Moldova. The first Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2018 marked a milestone in bilateral relations, establishing a platform for deeper engagement.[19] During this pivotal moment, Japan expressed its support for Moldova's European integration, while also initiating political dialogue to enhance collaboration. In 2022, the second Foreign Ministers' Meeting extensively focused on the Russian aggression in Ukraine,[20] highlighting Japan's extended responsibilities on the international stage. This strategic moment resulted in two key Japan-Moldova Summits, both addressing the effects of the war in Ukraine. Accordingly, in response to the crisis in Ukraine, Japan allocated a financial assistance package totalling 27 million US$ to mitigate the adverse impact of the conflict in Ukraine on Moldovan society.[21] As part of this assistance package, two specific initiatives have been developed so far. First of all, Japan and Moldova focused on enhancing human security, through socio-economic empowerment and inclusion, to address the burden generated by the influx of refugees. Secondly, the partnership was also aimed at addressing the economic situation in Moldova, by creating mechanisms to withstand the food and energy shocks stemming from the ongoing war.

Additionally, 2022 also witnessed the signing of the Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement (CMAA).[22] This agreement underscored the shared concerns of both nations regarding the dangers posed by illegal trafficking. Moreover, it also reflected the cooperative efforts of Tōkyō and Chișinău aimed at enhancing public security and establishing solid mechanisms to address transnational challenges. Furthermore, recognizing the growing relevance of cybersecurity, Japan, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), organised two seminars in 2023 focused on capacity building and policy formation.[23] These initiatives actually provide a holistic approach towards understanding *security*, extending beyond its traditional military and state-centered dimension, encompassing various domains such as social, societal and technology-related. As Japan continues to navigate the complexities of its foreign policy, its relationship with Moldova serves as a landmark for its broader global objectives. Specifically, this evolving partnership highlights Japan's willingness to engage in diverse areas of cooperation, from addressing regional security challenges to fostering economic and technological development (even in the form of knowledge-sharing). Moreover, the relationship between Tōkyō and Chișinău extends beyond bilateral interests, touching upon broader issues of regional stability, democratic values, and a shared framework of security.

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[19] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Moldova Foreign Ministers' Meeting," July 2, 2018.

[20] *Idem*, "Japan-Moldova Foreign Ministers' Meeting," May 13, 2022.

[21] UNDP, "Japan Contributes US$6.8 Million to Enhance the Energy, Food and Community Security of Moldova," March 20, 2023. https://www.undp.org/moldova/press-releases/japan-contributes-us68-million-enhance-energy-food-and-community-security-moldova.

[22] Ministry of Finance of Japan, "Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Moldova Regarding Mutual Administrative Assistance and Cooperation in Customs Matters," January 20, 2022.

[23] JICA, "JICA's Knowledge Co-Creation Programmes (KCCP)," https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/moldova/english/activities/kccp.html, accessed February 01, 2024.

2. Japan – Ukraine – The Special Global Partnership

In the case of Ukraine, the relationship takes an even more multifaceted dimension. Japan and Ukraine engaged in a rather strong political relationship, with regular Summit Meetings and Foreign Ministers' Meetings. This actually reflects a more strategically nuanced approach, indicative of Ukraine's significant role in regional geopolitics. The evolution of the relationship between Tōkyō and Kyiv underscores Japan's continued commitment to supporting Ukraine in various aspects, from reform initiatives to addressing security challenges. In 2015, Japan announced an 18.4 billion assistance package linked to Ukraine's progress in implementing internal reforms.[24] Consequently, Japan has been a supporter of Ukraine's comprehensive reform efforts towards political stability and social development. This support is also a part of Japan's broader normative strategy to promote democratic values and sustainable development. Consequently, "Japan is concentrating its support efforts on providing support for Ukraine and Moldova; sustainable development of these states is indispensable for the stability of the Black Sea Region".[25] The support for development is backed by a stronger political engagement, highlighting Japan's focus on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the realm of defence and traditional security, the Memorandum of Defence Cooperation and Exchange in the Field of Defence[26] signed in 2018 set a new precedent for Japan-Ukraine relations. Since 2020, regular Defence Ministers' Meetings have solidified this aspect of the partnership, showcasing that "Japan and Ukraine not only respect common values such as democracy, market economy, and rule of law, but also share common threats".[27]

Given the current degradation of the situation in Ukraine, Japan has emerged as one of the leading supporters of Kyiv, providing significant financial and humanitarian assistance. As of October 31st, 2023, Japan has committed 6.81 billion € in bilateral aid, comprising financial and humanitarian assistance, ranking 6th in bilateral commitments (after the EU, the US, Germany, the UK, and Norway).[28] While Japan's military assistance has been significantly limited due to its adherence to the 'Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology'[29], it has provided non-lethal support (such as bulletproof vests and medical equipment). In terms of human security, Japan has consistently supported efforts to mitigate the war's societal impacts. Moreover, the Japanese private sector also plays an instrumental role in providing assistance to Ukraine. As an example, Japanese businesses are facilitating remote medical care (as Japanese doctors can remotely analyse medical scans from Ukraine) and enhancing Kyiv's agricultural productivity through smart farming technologies (that utilize

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[24] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Ukraine Summit Meeting," September 29, 2015.

[25] Violetta Udovik, "The Black Sea Area in Japan's Expanding Strategic Horizons," *Ukraine Analytica* vol. 1, no. 19/2020, p. 77.

[26] Ministry of Defence of Japan, "Japan Defence Focus no. 122,"April 2020.

[27] Violetta Udovik, "The Ukraine-Japan Security Dialogue as an Important Contribution to International Peace and Security," *Journal of Inter-Regional Studies: Regional and Global Perspectives*, vol. 3, March 2020, p. 28.

[28] Christoph Trebesch et al., "The Ukraine Support Tracker," Kiel Institute for The World Economy, October 2023.

[29] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "The Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology," April 1, 2014.

artificial intelligence and sensors).[30] Such endeavours also underscore Japan's strategic approach towards creating favourable conditions for economic cooperation. In March 2023, Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the Ukrainian front represented a moment of significant symbolism in Japan's international diplomacy. Coinciding with the Xi-Putin Summit in Moscow, the timing of Kishida's visit underscored the contrasting stances of Japan and China towards the conflict: while China has maintained a more balanced but ambiguous stance, avoided direct criticism of Russia, and still called for a peaceful resolution, Japan has been one of the most ardent supporters of Ukraine. This strong stance (rather uncharacteristic of Japan) marked a notable shift from Tōkyō's more reserved response to the Annexation of Crimea. Such public expressions of support for Ukraine represent Japan's commitment to upholding international norms and its willingness to adopt a more proactive stance on the stage of global politics. Following Kishida's visit, a joint statement was issued, announcing that Japan and Ukraine would be upgrading their bilateral relations to a Special Global Partnership, showcasing, among other aspects such as the expansion of bilateral relations, the "inseparability of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security"[31]

Why is Japan Interested in Eastern Europe? Perspectives and Limitations

Japan's engagement in Eastern Europe, traditionally not a primary point of focus of its foreign policy, highlights both the changes in the dynamics of international politics, and the transformations in Japan's diplomatic horizons. Historically, Japan has strictly adhered to a policy of pacifism and limited intervention on the global stage. However, in the 2000s, the dynamics of international politics started to change, which also prompted a strategic re-evaluation. Accordingly, the 2004 National Defence Programme Guideline (NDPG) established a "direct connection between world peace and Japan's peace".[32]

Japan's engagement with areas outside its traditional sphere of foreign policy signalled a move towards a more coherent diplomatic strategy, emphasizing the defence and promotion of universal values (such as human rights and democracy). This was further reinforced with the "Proactive Contribution to Peace". Normatively speaking, these perspectives were aimed at strengthening diplomatic and strategic partnerships with countries worldwide (Eastern Europe included), in order to create a shared understanding of security. In this sense, Japan maintained security interests (with its multitude of meanings) towards Eastern Europe. This evolution reflects Tōkyō's aspirations to play a more active role in promoting global peace and security. Additionally, Japan's approach also highlights the interconnectedness of international security. Japan's previous engagement in Eastern Europe, through various financial packages and ODA diplomacy, focused extensively on human security and societal stability. Normatively, this came as a consequence of Japan's pacifist stance. Nonetheless, Japan's

[30] Kyodo News+, "Japan to Provide Remote Medical Care, Smart Farming Tech to Ukraine," October 14, 2023, https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2023/10/443d685c82cf-japan-to-provide-remote-medical-care-smart-farming-tech-to-ukraine.html?phrase=ukraine&words=Ukraine.

[31] President of Ukraine, "Joint Statement on Special Global Partnership between Ukraine and Japan," March 21, 2023, https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/spilna-zayava-pro-osoblive-globalne-partnerstvo-mizh-ukrayin-81717.

[32] Ministry of Defence of Japan, "Defence of Japan 2020 (Annual White Paper)," 2020, p. 215.

current approaches include active diplomatic engagement (prominently in the case of Moldova and Ukraine) and support for democratic reform, illustrating a more holistic and involved stance. In this logic, by supporting Eastern Europe in its democratic transition, Japan reinforces its role as a proponent of the rules-based international order. However, Japan's interest in Eastern Europe is also driven by the need to respond to global traditional security challenges. The region's security dynamics, particularly in light of the Russia – Ukraine conflict, actually raised significant political anxieties within the Japanese political consciousness, in a period mired by crises (such as the Coronavirus Pandemic and the Japanese political transitions). In this sense, the war in Ukraine "exacerbates the volatile security environment Japan is facing, with threats coming from China's growing military capabilities, contingencies in the Taiwan Strait, North Korea's nuclear programmes, and other, non-traditional threats".[33] Specifically, just as Kishida stated in June 2022, "Ukraine today could be East Asia of tomorrow".[34] These geopolitical considerations also are part of Japan's alignment towards a multipolar world, where it seeks to establish diversified partnerships.

Moving forward, Japan's strategic interests in Eastern Europe also extend into the economic realm. Tōkyō's support for economic reforms and its provision of ODA were aimed at fostering economic environments conducive to business expansions and investments. However, the economic component remained rather underdeveloped, especially in terms of direct trade and investment relationship. These modest trade relations are also impacted by the absence of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). Given that in 2018, the import and export trade volumes between Japan and Eastern Europe amounted to merely 0.11% of Japan's total trade, Tōkyō would not engage in lengthy efforts for signing FTAs with these countries.[35]

[33] Stephen R. Nagy and Hanh Nguyen, "Deterrence, Resilience, and Engagement: Tokyo's Response to the Ukraine War and Russia-China Alignment [version 1; peer review: 3 approved]," *Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations* vol. 3, no. 4/February 2, 2023, p. 5, https://doi.org/10.12688/stomiedintrelat.17632.1.

[34] 慶彦田嶋 [Yoshihiko Tajima], "「ウクライナは明日の東アジアかも」 岸田首相の主張、その思惑は？：朝日新聞デジタル ["'Ukraine today could be East Asia of Tomorrow' – Prime Minister Kishida's Claim – What are his intentions?", 朝日新聞デジタル [Asahi Shimbun Digital], February 23, 2023, https://www.asahi.com/notfound/notfound.htm.

[35] Kitade, *art. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

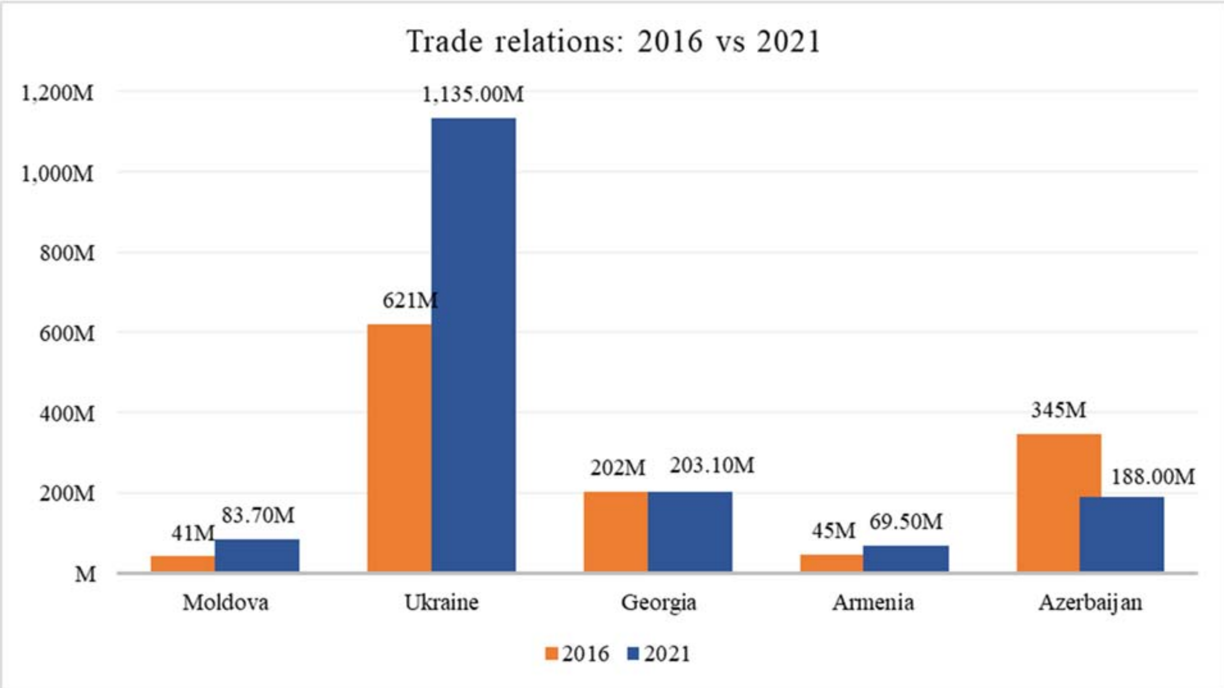


Image 1. Trade Relations between Japan and Eastern Europe: 2016 vs 2021
Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity

Accordingly, due to the geopolitical vulnerabilities to shocks of the region, Japanese companies have been rather selective in their investments. In spite of these, the region demonstrated potential for growth. The table above illustrates the evolution of Japan's trade relations with the region from 2016 to 2021.[36] Total trade volumes between Japan and Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia experienced substantial growth, increasing by 103.6%, 82.8% and 55.8% respectively. However, in the case of Georgia, trade activity remained largely unchanged with a minimal increase of 0.3%, while for Azerbaijan, there was a notable decline, with trade decreasing by 45.4%. Japan's direct investments in the region hold promise "not only thanks to the cheap and skilled labour force available, but also given the advantages and benefits of DCFTA agreements with the EU"[37]. Japan's interests in the region also extend into energy security. This focus, however, is divided into two interconnected elements. The first dimension is related to Japan's investments into energy projects in the region. Such investments are not only directed towards traditional energy sources, but also to the development of renewable energy projects. A relevant example is the Garadagh Solar Power Plant Project in Azerbaijan, the first large-scale power plan in the country, for which JICA signed a loan agreement in 2022, being one of the financers of the project.[38] The second dimension is related to the energy-related potential of Eastern Europe. Given Tōkyō's heavy reliance on energy

[36] Data has been adapted from "Japan (JPN) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners," The Observatory of Economic Complexity, https://oec.world/en/profile/country/jpn, accessed February 5, 2024.
[37] Kitade, *art. cit.*, p. 5.
[38] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Signing of a Loan Agreement for Garadagh Solar Power Project in Azerbaijan (Private Sector Investment Finance," August 3, 2022.

imports, it can explore Eastern Europe as an alternative source for its energy imports. In 2021, Japan was the 5th largest importer of crude petroleum, with primary imports coming from Saudi Arabia (21.9 billion US$), the United Arab Emirates (19.1 billion US$), Kuwait (4.67 billion US$), Qatar (4.37 billion US$) and Russia (2.23 billion US$).[39] Taking into consideration Japan's primary import markets of petroleum, it becomes clear than any disruptions within the region might affect supply chains. In this logic, given the current instability in the Middle East that holds the potential of escalating into a wider regional conflict, the Caucasus might prove a sustainable source of energy imports for Japan. Through such partnerships in Eastern Europe, Japan might mitigate risks associated with geopolitical instabilities in other parts of the world.

In addition to geo-strategic and economic interests, Japan places significant emphasis on human-to-human interactions as a key element of its foreign policy. Such an approach goes beyond the realm of traditional diplomacy, encompassing cultural and public interactions that connect societies. For Japan, such exchanges strive to "promote mutual understanding between Japan and foreign countries and build human networks".[40] Moreover, they become instrumental in fostering a deeper mutual understanding and in strengthening bilateral relations at a grassroots level. In the case of Eastern Europe, Tōkyō supports a series of student exchange programmes to facilitate international cooperation. As a specific example, MIRAI is a short-term youth exchange programme dedicated for Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.[41] MIRAI, which means *future* in Japanese, aims to foster a new generation of mutual understanding, by offering participants the opportunity to visit and study in Japan. These initiatives are a crucial component of Japan's foreign policy directions, complementing its economic and strategic engagements.

Limits of Japan's Influence and Reach

Japan's interests in Eastern Europe are not without their challenges. To begin with, Eastern Europe is a region deeply marked by geopolitical competition. In terms of infrastructure investment, one challenge for Japan is the presence and influence of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Through its extensive infrastructure investments, the BRI managed to outpace Japan's initiatives (such as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific – FIOP) in many aspects, such as mega projects.[42] Japan's more reticent investment strategies and focus on rules-based cooperation, while valuable, do not match the impact of China's larger scale projects. Moving forward, Japan's foreign policy in recent years has been largely oriented towards the FIOP strategy, downgrading Eastern Europe as less strategically important. This focus reflected Tōkyō's strategic approach to counterbalance China's growing influence in the regional

[39] Data has been adapted from "Crude Petroleum in Japan," The Observatory of Economic Complexity, https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/crude-petroleum/reporter/jpn, accessed February 5, 2024.
[40] A. Safril Mubah, "Japanese Public Diplomacy in Indonesia: The Role of Japanese Agencies in Academic Exchange Programmes between Japan and Indonesia," *Global Strategies* vol. 13, no. 1/April 8, 2019, p. 42, https://doi.org/10.20473/jgs.13.1.2019.37-50.
[41] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Europe Regions 'MIRAI'," November 21, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page24e_000109.html.
[42] Takeshi Miyai, "How Japan's and China's Connectivity Visions Intersect in Central and Eastern Europe: Ambitions and Ambiguities," Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade – Think Visegrad, 2019.

context. Consequently, resources, political attention and diplomatic efforts are more heavily invested in Asia-Pacific, leading to a comparatively limited engagement in Eastern Europe. Although Japan has economic interests in Eastern Europe, these are often overshadowed by the more impactful economic partnerships in other regions, particularly in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, even within the region itself, Japan's engagement varies, with countries like Moldova and Ukraine receiving more attention compared to others like Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This can be attributed to the political "distance" of these states towards the EU. As the EU is a significant political, economic, and diplomatic ally of Japan, actors that are politically "closer" to it naturally hold a higher importance in Tōkyō's foreign policy horizon.

Additionally, Japan's normative commitments to universal values have, at times, faced pragmatic challenges. The most perfect example occurred in 2014 during, the annexation of Crimea, when Japan's reaction was notably restrained due to strategic interests towards Russia. Moreover, in relation to democracy promotion, although it is substantive, there are voices even within Japan who consider that "[d]emocracy is not necessarily commonly accepted as a guiding norm for foreign policy even among Japanese media; at least some of the media view democracy more as an umbrella term useful for strategic diplomacy".[43] In such cases, Japan's normative commitments play against more pragmatic diplomatic and political considerations. Lastly, Eastern Europe's historical and ongoing engagement with other significant global actors further complicate Japan's strategic positioning in the region. These actors (such as the EU, Russia, and the US) manifest varied and entrenched interests in the region, making it difficult for Japan to establish a similar level of influence, given geographic distance and the existing power dynamics. This is also paired with the cultural and historical distance that exists between Japan and Eastern European countries.

While Japan is becoming a significant global actor, its influence in Eastern Europe is not at the same level as the more dominant actors. However, Japan's recent efforts towards the region, particularly in promoting stability through multilateral platforms, ensuring economic development, and upholding the rules-based order, showcase its increase proactive role in global politics. In this sense, Japan's recent engagement in the region make it a meaningful partner that fosters rules-based behaviour and an effort towards addressing transnational challenges.

Conclusion

As Japan shapes its role as a significant global actor, its evolving engagement in Eastern Europe emerges as a novel element of its broader foreign policy strategy. At the level of ideas, Japan's efforts in Eastern Europe are underpinned by the belief in the interconnectedness of regional stability and global peace. Through various initiatives, Japan has actively contributed to the stability and development of the region, aligning with its global objectives. This was evident through infrastructure development projects, technological cooperation, capacity-building, and knowledge-sharing exercises. The paper has explored the multifaceted nature of

[43] Maiko Ichihara, "The Role of Democracy Promotion in Japanese Foreign Policy," in Nicholas Szechenyi et. al (eds.), *Asianism and Universalism: The Evolution of Norms and Power in Modern Asia,* Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2019, pp. 11-12.

Japan's interests in Eastern Europe, navigating through complex geopolitical landscapes, economic pursuit, and cultural exchanges. While Japan's influence in the region may not match that of more dominant actors, its proactive approach and upholding of the rules-based order showcase its growing role on the global stage. To conclude, Japan's pursuit of interests in Eastern Europe is characterized by a blend of strategic initiatives, such as energy security and soft power strategies, such as, human-to-human exchanges. Moreover, Tōkyō's approach towards the region reflects a delicate balance between a traditional posture committed to pacifism and the evolving realities of international relations.

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The Path Toward the European Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Other Western Balkan States

Emilia Nicoleta Șchiop

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to analyse the progress of the negotiations between the Balkan countries and the European Union. The objectives of the article are to present the context of the negotiations, to show the current state of these negotiations (to analyse the most relevant chapters from the process from the European reports) through the content analysis method, to evaluate.
The states from the Western Balkans does not meet the conditions for membership of the EU. All negotiation chapters are not closed. To resolve this issue, the EU works towards revealing the mandatory requirements related to the accession process, while the candidate country is striving to meet its membership conditions by creating the necessary institutions during the process. About the methodology, the paper starts with the contextual part (from special sources).
In this article we are analysing some of the domains from the European Commission reports on the North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania. We are transforming the content into position documents. They will have the following structure after the analysis: introduction (presentation of the issue, the circumstances), points of agreement, points of disagreement and conclusions (document analysis). The study about the negotiation chapters is not purely descriptive, the information is analysed and restructured (by transforming the content into position documents). The paper has chosen to analyse the European reports related to the accession negotiation, because the information is objective, and it shows both sides (EU and the candidate countries throw agreement and disagreement points).
There is not a study in the field literature that analyse the accession discussions for by using the same method (transforming the content into position documents). Regarding the results and discussions, looking at the report published by the European Commission, the study is able to show whether or not the preparations made by this state are generally advanced. As conclusions, generally, the final works can highlight the level of improvement for the detailed negotiation chapters, which contains concrete requirements related to policy implementations.

Keywords: the Western Balkans, the European Union, accession negotiations, enlargement, progress.

The Context of Negotiations

Ever since the Ottoman Empire, the development of the Balkan states has intertwined and resulted in various similarities between them.

The Balkans, especially Turkey, represent the cultural and historical bridge between East and West. It is a region where the seeds of many civilizations have been sown, as well as a land that has witnessed endless wars fought to enhance different visions of history.

It is the geographical gap between two worlds, which sometimes merged, as during the Roman Empire, and at others collided violently with each other, as during the Crusades. Historically and strategically, the Balkans are as important to the future of Europe today as

they were a century ago, when the fanatic anarchists of Sarajevo provided the casus belli for the First World War.[1]

If there were connections between the Balkan states since the time of the Ottoman Empire, we will be able to observe their different evolutions, their finality being a possible European integration.

All six former Yugoslav states were affected by two successive wars. The reasons for the conflicts were ethnic, political, religious, and economic. On one side of the barricade were the Serbs, on the other side the Croats, Bosniaks and Albanians, but there was also a conflict between the Bosniaks and Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Macedonians and Albanians from North Macedonia.[2] The Western Balkans can also resemble Turkey in terms of ethnic tensions. The tense events in the Balkans can be demystified.

Southeast Europe was not destined to become violent, and the construction of the Balkans as endemic violence misses an important political and historical point.[3]

The fall of the communist regime in Eastern Europe was accompanied by severe ethno-national tensions in the region.[4] However, despite the crises, the Balkan communities have preserved their values.

The states of the Western Balkans are turning to the European Union to speed up their economic reconstruction, to improve mutual relations damaged by ethnic and religious wars, as well as to strengthen its democratic institutions.

Countries that belonged to Soviet Communism made efforts to establish the rule of law and encourage democracy. They demonstrated religious freedom, tolerance, and diversity.[5] These elements are strong components for a rapprochement with European values.

Thus, the EU granted candidate country status to the North Macedonia in November 2005, to Montenegro in 2010, to Serbia in 2012, to Albania in 2013, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are a potential candidate state.[6]

The EU is fully committed to the EU integration of the Western Balkans: this is a shared strategic objective that unites the whole region and the EU. Accession talks are underway with Montenegro and Serbia and in March 2020, the European Council agreed to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are potential candidates for EU membership. The Western Balkans are on the path to EU accession. The European Union accession process is at the centre of EU-Western Balkans relations. The EU is the leading trade partner for all Western Balkans, with almost 70% of the region's total

[1] Christopher Deliso, *The Coming Balkan Caliphate: the Threat of Radical Islam to Europe and the West,* Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007.
[2] Robert Anthony Simpson, "Slobodan Milošević's Yugoslavia," BBC*,* 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/europe/2000/milosevic_yugoslavia/communism.stm.
[3] Cathie Carmichael, *Ethnic Cleansing in the Balkans*, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2004, p. 1.
[4] Katherine Verdery, "Ethnic Relations, Economies of Shortage, and the Transition in Eastern Europe," in Chris M. Hann (ed), *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 169.
[5] Thomas Patrick Melady, *Albania: a Nation of Unique Inter-religious Tolerance and Steadfast Aspirations for EU Integration,* 2010, http://www.academicus.edu.al/nr7/Academicus-MMXIII-7-013-018.pdf, p. 12.
[6] The European Commission, "The EU Accession of the Western Balkans*,*" 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/eu-accession-process-western-bakans_0.pdf.

trade and from 2011 to 2021, EU trade with the Western Balkans has grown by almost 130%. In the same period, the Western Balkans exports to the EU have increased by 207%.[7]

The Analysis of the negotiation chapters

North Macedonia: since the negotiation talks have not started for a long time, this country has not yet officially opened any negotiation chapters.

North Macedonia: chapter: free movement of labour:

A. Analysis of the talks during the negotiations: North Macedonia's relations with Turkey have developed. Turkey and the countries of the Western Balkans continued to support the stability of the region through the South-East European[8] cooperation process to facilitate the free movement of labour. Regarding health insurance, there were several meetings between experts from North Macedonia and the EU.

The country has 23 bilateral agreements on the coordination of social security systems, 14 of which are with EU member states. There are a total of 18 reciprocal health insurance agreements that allow people from one country to use health care services in another country. In 2020 the country adopted guidelines for regulating the temporary stay of guided workers in accordance with bilateral agreements. There are still nine agreements between North Macedonia and the EU member states.[9]

B. Document review: citizens of one EU Member State may be employed in another member state and must be granted the same working and social conditions as other workers.[10]

Points of agreement: the law on the employment of foreigners regulates their access to the labor market and every year the country decides on the maximum quota of work permits for foreigners divided by type.

Points of disagreement: a foreign worker can obtain only one work permit by registering only one application for one authority within one institution. European citizens do not have access to public administration positions.[11]

Conclusions: North Macedonia should have continued to adopt the legal framework in line with the acquis for access to the labour market, in particular regarding the elimination of discrimination based on the nationality of EU workers.

Preparations are at an early stage. No progress has been made.[12] Signs of discrimination based on ethnicity could be observed.

North Macedonia: chapter: social policy and employment:

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[7] European Union External Action, "The EU and the Western Balkans: towards a Common Future," 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-western-balkans-towards-common-future_en.

[8] The European Commission, "Turkey 2019 – report," 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-turkey-report.pdf, p. 62.

[9] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*

[10] *Ibidem,* p. 57.

[11] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*

[12] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*

A. Analysis of the discussions within the negotiations: in 2015 and 2016 there was conditionality to continue the implementation of the Pržino agreement and significant changes for the application of important issues for an urgent reformation.

Given the progress achieved, the European Commission reiterated its unconditional recommendation to open discussions in April 2018. Given the significant progress achieved and the fulfilment of the conditions unanimously set by the EU Council in June 2018, the European Commission recommended in May 2019: the opening of the debates.[13]

B. Document analysis: EU social rules include minimum standards for labour law, equality, health and safety at work and non-discrimination. It also promotes social dialogue at the level of the European Union.[14]

Points of agreement: the implementation of the 2018 - 2027 national strategy on deinstitutionalization has begun and has already contributed to the inclusion of children with disabilities in society. The resettlement of children and adults from institutional care to foster care or community housing is ongoing. The relevant institutions are very much engaged in the deinstitutionalization process.[15] Amendments to the law on minimum wages, which provide for a constant increase in the minimum wage, with the aim of stimulating the economy through private consumption, were adopted.[16]

Points of disagreement: the time required to prepare the process and fulfil the prerequisites were underestimated.[17] Law enforcement continues to lag. A consultation is underway on the new labour legislation.

Conclusions: the country remains moderately prepared in this area. It must continue to implement activation measures for the long-term unemployed and low-skilled persons, including women, persons with disabilities and Roma, it must improve the capacities of the State Labor Inspectorate and strengthen the dialogue between employers and workers. It should also continue to provide assistance to all vulnerable groups in society while addressing poverty and anti-discrimination.[18]

North Macedonia is moderately prepared in this negotiation chapter but started these debates later than other states from the Western Balkans.

North Macedonia: chapter: science and research:

A. Analysis of the discussions within the negotiations: most of the meetings leading to beneficial conclusions took place between October 2012 and September 2013. Progress was made on the basis of decisions taken, legislation adopted, and measures implemented.[19] This approach ensures non-discriminatory equal treatment of women, minorities, etc. in all reports and allows an objective assessment.

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[13] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[14] *Ibidem,* p. 82.
[15] *Ibidem,* p. 84.
[16] *Ibidem,* p. 82.
[17] *Ibidem,* p. 84.
[18] *Ibidem,* p. 82.
[19] *Idem,* "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2012 – Progress Report," 2012, p. 4.

The solution to the problem that should be found without delay represents those 20 years since the country's membership in the United Nations Organisation.

A political crisis was noted following events in parliament in December 2012. A political agreement was reached on March 1. The agreement allowed the return of all parliamentarians to the parliament, the holding of local elections, the continuation of relevant reforms, as well as the explicit commitment to the Euro-Atlantic agenda, the establishment of an inquiry committee to make the changes proposed by the parliament and the commitment to restore dialogue with journalists.[20] Gjorge Ivanov made efforts in this regard in relation to the EU representatives.

B. Document analysis: The Stabilization and Association Agreement between North Macedonia and the EU entered into force in April 2004,[21] following progress including in this area.

Points of agreement: regarding European standards in education, training and youth, laws on secondary and higher education have been amended.[22] Strategies have been developed to minimize school violence.

Points of disagreement: the national qualifications framework remains to be developed. The programme for the development of sport was not adopted. Participation in pre-school education has declined since 2010 and performance on science tests is unsatisfactory.[23] The national targets did not address priorities for education and training.

Regional disparities remain high.[24]

Conclusions: some progress has been made in the field of education, vocational training, youth, and culture. There is an improvement in the country's performance in terms of education and training in 2020, there are common criteria and the compliance assessment that has been prepared for full future participation in mobility projects,[25] which has remained a priority. Preparations in the educational and cultural sectors have reached a relatively advanced level.

There are no significant differences between the Western Balkans countries in terms of progress.

North Macedonia: chapter: education and culture:

A. Analysis of the discussions within the negotiations: the policy of involvement in the Western Balkans from a cultural point of view continued.

Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner, Olivér Várhelyi, commented in March 2020: "The opening of accession talks sends a strong and clear message not only to the two countries, but also to the Western Balkans as a whole." It reaffirms and fulfils the EU's commitment to the European perspective of the region: its present is with the EU and its future is in the EU. The European Commission will move quickly and soon propose the draft

[20] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[21] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[22] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[23] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[24] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[25] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*

negotiation frameworks with the two countries, integrating the elements of the revised methodology. Today's decision confirms the geostrategic importance of the Western Balkans and demonstrates that the European Union is willing and able to take geopolitical decisions even in these difficult times of the corona virus pandemic.[26]

B. Document analysis: interaction between ethnic communities in the field of education is important in the European Union.[27]

Points of agreement: the education reform process continued according to the national education strategy for the years 2006 - 2015. An external assessment of student performance was established. New subjects such as ethics, entrepreneurship, media, and the environment were brought into schools. Implementation of the Bologna process in higher education continued, the Adult Education Council adopted the strategy for adult education in the context of lifelong learning, and efforts were made to develop a national qualifications framework.[28] The government has taken steps to increase resources and places for pre-school education, investing in pre-school infrastructure and high-quality teacher training[29] for the sector.

Points of disagreement: limited progress has been made in education, training and youth, and resources have been inadequate to implement the education strategy. Large regional disparities remained for access to education.[30] North Macedonia falls well short of the EU's 2020 education and training target of 95%, only 30% of children following authorized pre-school institutions in the 2018 - 2019 school year.[31]

Conclusions: some progress was made in the field of culture: the country continued to participate in cultural programmes.[32] North Macedonia is moderately prepared in this regard. Limited progress has been made with the adoption of the new law on higher education. The implementation of measures from the global education strategy 2018 - 2025 remained limited and since none of the 2018 recommendations were implemented, they remained valid. The country should, in particular: implement the new strategic framework for education, especially the objectives for pre-school education, increase support for teacher training, develop teachers professionally and ensure an effective evaluation process. Access to quality education for all has also not improved, especially for preschool enrolment of children with disabilities and children from Roma communities.[33]

[26] *Idem,* "The European Commission Welcomes the Green Light to Opening of Accession Talks with Albania and North Macedonia," 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/news/commission-welcomes-green-light-opening-accession-talks-albania-and-north-macedonia_en.

[27] Emilia Nicoleta Șchiop, "The Cultural Values of the Accession Negotiations between North Macedonia and the European Union," in Karla Melina Barth, Mircea Brie, Dragoș Dărăbăneanu, István Polgár (eds.), *The Role of Intercultural Communication in Adapting Ethnic Groups to the European Union Social Space,* Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2019, p. 149.

[28] The European Commission, "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2010 - progress report," 2010, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/mk_rapport_2010_en.pdf, p. 69.

[29] *Idem*, "North Macedonia 2019," p. 85.

[30] *Idem*, "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," p. 69.

[31] *Idem*, "North Macedonia 2019 – report," p. 85.

[32] *Idem*, "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," p. 69.

[33] *Idem*, "North Macedonia 2019," p. 85.

In this area North Macedonia has made early preparations. However, regarding ethnic discrimination, less problems were encountered in the state.

In the case of **Montenegro,** the main problem consisted in the fact that in 2015 one can remember the assassination attempt[34] of the current president, Milo Đukanović, who was then the Prime Minister. The suspects were two Russian residents, members of an organisation with criminal aims to undermine the constitutional order of Montenegro.

Montenegro has all negotiation chapters open (the last one opened in 2020).[35]

Montenegro: chapter: free movement of labour:

A. Analysis of the discussions in the negotiations: this state has made a lot of progress in this regard.

In Podgorica in June 2020, the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Duško Marković, emphasized[36] that including the opening of this negotiation chapter is proof of the commitment to successfully fulfil the obligations of the European agenda.

He also claimed that it is a confirmation of the leadership position in the enlargement process, as well as a great recognition to the government and all institutions for the hard work adopted the application of European standards and harmonization with European regulations.[37]

B. Document analysis: the first laws were adopted only in December 2015.[38]

Points of agreement: laws have been passed.

So, the laws regarding foreign citizens were approved and negotiations began with Romania, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, and Bulgaria related to the social security system.[39]

Points of disagreement: no progress has been made regarding access to the labour market for European citizens.

The main points of the acquis and the administrative rules have not yet been adopted.[40]

Conclusions: no progress has been made.

This chapter is at an early stage.[41] In the case of Montenegro the preparations against discrimination have not yet been carried out.

Montenegro: chapter: justice, freedom, and security:

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[34] Emilia Nicoleta Șchiop, „Calea spre UE a statului Muntenegru în contextul securității actuale" (Montenegro's path to the EU in the current security context), in Margareta Aslan, Lucian Năstasă-Kovács (eds.), *Anuarul Școlii doctorale Relații internaționale și studii de securitate – de la securitatea elitelor la elitele securității* (The Annuary of the International Relations and security studies doctoral school – from the security of the elites to the elites of security), Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2017, p. 108.

[35] European Western Balkans, "EU to Open the Final Negotiating Chapter with Montenegro, PM Says," June 24, 2020, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/06/24/eu-to-open-the-final-negotiating-chapter-with-montenegro-pm-says/.

[36] *Ibidem.*

[37] *Ibidem.*

[38] The European Commission, "Montenegro 2015 - report," 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_montenegro.pdf, p. 30.

[39] *Ibidem,* p. 31.

[40] *Ibidem,* p. 32.

[41] *Ibidem*, pp. 30-32.

A. Review of negotiations discussions: in June 2020 the European Parliament's rapporteur for Montenegro, Tonino Picula, congratulated the country on progress in its accession negotiation process. "These are the closest to full EU membership, which still depends on meeting all the set criteria," Picula wrote.[42]

B. Document analysis: in the EU there are common rules for control that regulate borders, visas, external migration, and asylum. For cooperation it was desired to eliminate border controls within the EU and fight against organised crime and terrorism, but also in the judicial, police, and customs fields.[43]

Points of agreement: important aspects have been achieved.

Criminal justice reform was carried out and the police reorganised, and migration and asylum reception centres became operational. [44]

Points of disagreement: however, issues remain unresolved.

No history of investigations, pursuits, seizures, and confiscations in cases of crime has been made, the capacity to deal with flows, and mixed migration has not been fully improved, not paying special attention to vulnerable groups and minors, and no investment has been made in the supervision and control of the capacity to border and in the direction of solving border management problems with neighbouring countries.[45]

Conclusions: the field is moderately prepared.

Progress has been made, but without full implementation of the justice, freedom, and security action plan.[46]

In this area more progress has been made than in the Turkish state, being at a moderate stage. It should be noted that the issue of the state of Montenegro is closely related to the regional issues that have gravitated around Serbia's actions for the past three decades.

Montenegro: chapter: science and research:

A. Analysis of the talks during the negotiations: Duško Marković, the Prime Minister of Montenegro specified at the EU talks for the Western Balkans in the summer of 2020 by accepting the new EU enlargement methodology, Montenegro has shown itself willing to further dynamize the process, as the emphasis, it will not only focus on the technical aspect but also on the political aspect of enlargement.[47] Science and research through technical advances were also emphasized at that meeting.

After Serbia fully cooperated with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was initiated (at the end of 2007)."

B. Document analysis: as regards the Innovation Union, the new legislation on innovation activities has not yet been accepted.

[42] European Western Balkans, *art. cit.*
[43] The European Commission, "Montenegro 2015," p. 62.
[44] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[45] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[46] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[47] European Western Balkans, *art. cit.*

Points of agreement: Montenegro participated in the EU research and innovation project "Horizon 2020" as an associated country. Administrative capacity is good, with the nominated network of national contact points and representatives in[48] the project.

Points of disagreement: however, based on the statistics, participation was very low. The country should have assessed its current performance for Horizon 2020. It was not focused on areas of strategic interest for the country and the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in these actions was not stimulated.

Conclusions: progress has been made, there is a good stage of the debates. However, a few issues have not been resolved. Intensification of efforts to increase investment in research, especially by stimulating investment from the private sector, has not been achieved. Efforts have not been increased or focused on participation in the EU programme, Horizon 2020.[49]

Other Balkan countries are more advanced in this field.

Montenegro: chapter: education and culture:

A. Analysis of discussions during the negotiations: in 2015 the Montenegrin state negotiated with 12 third countries, four of which are EU member states. Various treaties were negotiated. Montenegro continued to be actively involved in the Central European Agreement and is part of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.[50]

B. Document analysis: workshops and information days were organised.

Points of agreement: the educational infrastructure was good.

Points of disagreement: administrative and control capacity needs to be improved. For human aid and development policies, there is a need to improve financial and institutional capacity. Humanitarian contributions were still made with a legislative framework.[51]

Conclusions: specific themes for Horizon 2020 aimed at increasing participation by bringing relevant stakeholders together would have been needed.[52] This chapter is in its infancy. This negotiation chapter is in an early stage.

Serbia has 10 open negotiation chapters.[53]

Serbia: chapter: free movement of labour:

A. Analysis of the discussions during the negotiations: the visa facilitation agreements regarding the Serbian state from January, the adoption by the EU Council of the revised European partnership for Serbia from February, the signing in Luxembourg of the Stabilization Agreement and the Interim Agreement in the field of trade from April were made in 2008.[54]

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[48] The European Commission, "Montenegro 2015," pp. 67-68.
[49] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*
[50] Șchiop, „Calea spre UE," p. 112.
[51] *Ibidem,* pp. 72 – 73.
[52] The European Commission, "Montenegro 2015," p. 67.
[53] *Idem,* "Enlargement: Pre Acceding Countries & Candidate countries: Potential Candidate Countries," 2005, http://web.archive.org/web/20060223075113/http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/candidate.htm.
[54] Emilia Nicoleta Șchiop, „Migrația în Balcanii de Vest – Serbia" (Migration in the Western Balkans – Serbia), in Claudia Anamaria Iov, Adrian Liviu Ivan, Maria Claudia Bogdan (eds.), *Dinamica migrației în/spre Europa:*

B. Analysis of the documents: full implementation was present, the necessary international instruments also existed.[55] The mandatory rules of international trade have been respected.[56]

Points of agreement: Serbia's goals have been defined for the National Employment Service.[57] The bilateral agreements with Austria, Bulgaria and Slovakia on the coordination of security systems have been implemented.[58] The legal basis for technical regulations, standards, conformity assessments, metrology and accreditation was created with the aim of aligning with the acquis.[59] On standardization, the Serbian Institute for Standardization became a full member of the European Committee for Standardization and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization in January 2017.[60] In terms of accreditation, the Serbian accreditation body was successfully re-evaluated in a peer review by the European Cooperation for Accreditation Association in 2017, allowing this institution to retain its status in the Multilateral Accreditation Agreement of European level.[61]

Points of disagreement: regarding the access to the labour market, the law on the employment of foreigners[62] was to be approved by the parliament.
The database of the National Employment Service was still incomplete, and employers had no obligations. Collaboration with Slovenia was difficult. Institutions had to be strengthened.[63] Preparations for the European Health Insurance Card have not been made.[64] On the other hand, no new legislation has been adopted regarding the access to the labour market and the work permit procedures for EU citizens, which are governed by the rules for third-country nationals. The procedure should have been simplified further.[65]

Conclusions: little progress has been made and changes have been moderately advanced.[66] Serbia is moderately prepared.[67] Serbia is advanced, being in a moderate stage. The Serbian state is the closest to European integration among the Balkan states where accession negotiations are underway.

Serbia: chapter: justice, freedom, and security:

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de la teorie la practică (The Dynamics of Migration to and From Europe: from Theory to Pratice), Cluj-Napoca: CA, 2017, 130.

55 The European Commission, "Serbia 2013 - progress report," 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2013/package/sr_rapport_2013.pdf, p.10.

56 *Ibidem,* p. 14.

57 Șchiop, "The Path toward EU of Serbia," in *Analele Universității din Oradea – relații internaționale și studii europene,* nr. 11, p. 45.

58 *Idem,* „Migraţia în Balcanii de Vest – Serbia," p. 130.

59 The European Commission, "Serbia 2018 - report," 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-serbia-report.pdf, p. 53.

60 Șchiop, "The Path toward EU of Serbia," p. 45.

61 The European Commission, "Serbia 2018 - report," p. 53.

62 Șchiop, „Migraţia în Balcanii de Vest – Serbia," p. 130.

63 *Idem,* "The Path toward EU of Serbia," p. 45.

64 *Idem,* „Migraţia în Balcanii de Vest – Serbia," p. 130.

65 The European Commission, "Serbia 2018 - report," p. 54.

66 *Ibidem,* p. 22.

67 *Ibidem*, p. 54.

A. Analysis of the discussions during the negotiations: the law on foreign exchange operations was adopted in December 2013.[68] Long-term capital transactions have been liberalized. Serbia has initiated the national risk assessment process in the fight against money laundering. The Money Laundering Prevention Agency signed the Memorandum of understanding with Argentina, Andorra, Panama, Denmark and Portugal, the total number of signatures being 42.[69]

B. Document analysis: in examining economic developments in Serbia, the Commission's approach was guided by the conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council of June 1993. For any member of the European Union, it is necessary to have a functioning market economy and the ability to face competitive pressure and market forces within the European Union.[70]

Points of agreement: the Business Registration Agency has published the status of economic entities. The agency submitted the register to the chamber of commerce in January 2013. In the fields of corporate accounting and auditing, the accounting law was adopted in July 2013.[71]

Points of disagreement: electronic registration was not operational. The law adopted in July sought to ensure the implementation of the fourth directive and the seventh directive on the law of commercial companies and harmonization with the eighth directive of the European Commission in this field, but the process has not been completed.

Conclusions: progress has been made. Two laws were adopted for corporate accounting and auditing, and the other laws will be finalized. Alignment has been advanced.[72] Serbia is well prepared.

Serbia: chapter: science and research:

A. Analysis of the negotiations discussions: some of the laws in this area and on vocational training were adopted in 2010. In April 2010 a new law on pre-school education aimed at improving the quality and access to education was accepted.

B. Document analysis: Major legislative improvements have been made. However, the legislative and constitutional framework has left room for unjustified political influence, requiring modification.

Points of agreement: A new law on the protection of topographies of semiconductor products was adopted in June 2013.

"The Copyright and Related Rights Commission has been abolished and its responsibilities transferred to the Intellectual Property Office." In terms of industrial property law, the trademark law was amended in January, for better harmonization with the community acquis, and Serbia became a member of the International Union for the Protection of New Plant Species.

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[68] *Ibidem,* p. 23.
[69] Șchiop, "The Path toward EU of Serbia," pp. 46 – 47.
[70] The European Commission, "Serbia 2018 - report," p. 14.
[71] *Ibidem*, p. 24.
[72] *Ibidem*, *loc. cit.*

Points of disagreement: "certain changes to the law on intellectual property rights, adopted in December, were not in line with the acquis." Harmonization with the acquis was required to be achieved within five years at the most. The Office for Intellectual Property needed additional capacity to cope with the new responsibilities.

Conclusions: Limited progress has been made. The execution was improved, but the coordination of the actors was not achieved. The changes to the law regarding the collection of fees in the field of copyright constituted a step back in alignment with the EU acquis. Overall alignment was advanced.

This negotiation chapter compared between Serbia and Turkey: Turkey is more advanced in this regard.

Serbia: Chapter: Education and Culture:

A. Analysis of talks in the negotiations: Johannes Hahn from the European Commission "was in Serbia on 20 November 2014." He met with his counterpart, Jadranka Joksimovic. They discussed "that his country's alignment with the EU's foreign and security policy will have to take place after Serbia becomes a full member" of the European Union, but that progress in the field of education must come faster.

B. Document analysis: "in examining the economic developments in Serbia, the approach of the European Commission was guided by the conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council of June 1993."

Points of agreement: "the education strategy and its action plan are being implemented, albeit with delays." There has been little public consultation on recently adopted regulations; enrolment and attainment rates in pre-university education are consistently high.

Points of disagreement: higher education study programmes need to better match the demands of the labour market. The unemployment rate for university graduates (up to 24 years old) has decreased and needs to improve (however, it remains high at 35.9% in 2017). The emigration of young, qualified people remains at a high rate.

Conclusions: Serbia should, in particular: increase participation in early education, especially of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and complete the establishment of the national qualifications system. "Serbia is at a good level of preparation in the field of education and culture. Some progress has been made in the field of programmes and the establishment of the Erasmus+ national agency."

This negotiation chapter compares between Serbia and Turkey: Turkey is moderately prepared, Serbia is advanced.

Discussion

The European Union wishes their neighbouring countries to be partners and to maintain good relations with them for effective functioning. If the official discussions on potential integration would be suspended, then official relations with the Western Balkan states could be jeopardized, in particular because of the unstable situation in the Western Balkan states, but also internationally.

The strategy must be followed by concrete steps for the implementation of commitments and the presentation of clear and tangible results. Montenegro should also step-up cooperation with the European institutions and with its relevant bodies to take into consideration key recommendations and implement all human rights decisions in accordance with the recommendations.

Conclusion

As general conclusions about the future integration of the Western Balkan states, it is seen that the most important negotiating chapters are in a medium stage, which means new efforts. The Western Balkan states changed a part of its legislation to include the European acquis. This was the metamorphosis of the states in legislative terms with immediate effects. Besides the fact that Western Balkan states are not advanced from this point of view, it faces new obstacles in the path toward integration (the EU attention is at the current crises), but it could receive the help of the European Union, which wants to keep cohesion between the member state and not to abandon the objective of enlargement.

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Managing Security in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood: Perspectives and Defence Resource Management Strategies

Simona-Daniela Bordea

Abstract: This article examines the major security challenges facing the EU in the Eastern neighbourhood and debate the EU's defence resource management strategies, especially the finances. Through the analysis of case studies, it will show how such an integrated approach can help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of security efforts. The article also focuses on issues related to financing, defence capacity building and partnership development in an attempt to identify best practices and encourage closer cooperation between the EU and the Member States of the Eastern Neighbourhood. Finally, the article concludes that an integrated approach to defence resource management can help improve security in the EU's eastern neighbourhood and contribute to strengthening stability and prosperity in this region.

Keywords: EU, EUSC, ENP, EaP, Moldova, Ukraine, cooperation, financial resources.

"World peace cannot be safeguarded
without making the creative efforts
proportionate to the dangers which threaten it."
Robert Schuman

Introduction

The European Union (EU) is dedicated to enhancing international peace, security, and stability, and safeguarding the global order rooted in the principles outlined in the UN Charter. By backing conflict mediation and prevention, crisis management, capacity enhancement, and humanitarian aid, the EU serves as a responsible, pertinent, and competent player on the global stage. In light of current geopolitical changes, mutually beneficial security and defence partnerships are becoming essential for maintaining a rules-based international order and for ensuring effective multilateralism in order to achieve common goals and contribute to global peace and security.

In order for the EU's security and defence policy to be more effective, it is necessary for the EU to become more active in pursuing its objectives through civilian or military means, more coherent by uniting efforts and ensuring unity of command in times of crisis, and more capable by allocating greater resources, avoiding duplication, and better coordinating existing resources.

In other words, the ongoing developments in the contemporary security environment, as well as the continuously evolving nature of risks and threats to the EU and its citizens, necessitate, on one hand, ensuring adequate resources and capabilities for an efficient response, and on the other hand, strategic adaptation based on a common vision endorsed by all EU

member states, which could only be achieved through the development of a new programmatic document.

The EU Vision on the Defence and Security of Its Borders

Originally conceived as a purely economic union, the EU has progressively transformed into an organisation engaged in diverse policy domains, spanning from climate, environment, and health to foreign relations, security, justice, and migration.

According to international national defence expert Hari Bucur-Marcu, entities charged with defence and security responsibilities must translate defence policies into action, while simultaneously establishing adequate and sustainable planning mechanisms, support systems and infrastructure.[1] Therefore, the EU persists in its endeavours to enhance the transparency and democratic nature of its governing institutions. Moreover, the EU relies not only on the solidarity and cooperative efforts of its member states but also actively seeks input from its citizens and promotes their engagement.

The security of the Union was presented as the first priority of the EUGS, given the importance attached to it by Member States and EU institutions already in 2016. Notwithstanding the salience of this priority back then, implementation in the last three years has exceeded expectations. The ongoing deterioration of the strategic context, and Member States' and EU institutions' growing political resolve to address this together, resulted in a new Level of Ambition with three overarching objectives: crisis management; building the security and defence capacities of our partners; and protecting the EU itself.

Through its unified foreign and security policy, the EU has the ability to present a unified voice and take collective action on the global stage, allowing member states to address challenges beyond their individual capacities and ensuring the security and prosperity of EU citizens.

In order to enhance the protection of its citizens and uphold its values, the EU must strategically enhance its defence capabilities and bolster its ability to act independently. Consequently, the EU's security and defence policy is shaped by the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), along with a range of supplementary strategies and tools, encompassing: diplomacy, humanitarian aid, development cooperation, climate action, human rights, economic support, trade policy.[2]

First, CFSP endeavours to maintain peace, enhance global security, foster international collaboration, and reinforce democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. Enacted by the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1993, it underwent revisions through the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Second to that, CSDP) constitutes the segment of the CFSP focused on defence and crisis management, encompassing defence cooperation and coordination among EU member states. Introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, it empowers

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[1] Hari Bucur-Marcu, "Introduction," in Hari Bucur-Marcu, Philipp Fluri, Todor Tagarev (eds.), *Defence Management: An Introduction*, Geneva: Procon Ltd., 2009, p. 4, https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Defence_Management_Intro.pdf.

[2] European Council, "EU Cooperation on Security and Defence," March 7, 2024, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/.

the EU to conduct civilian and military missions and operations abroad, such as: conflict prevention, peacekeeping, joint disarmament operations, military advisory roles, humanitarian assistance, post-conflict stabilization.[3]

The EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) is an important strategic document for the EU's defence and security due to the fact that it has demonstrated its value in providing a strategic vision and a shared agenda for Member States and gave birth to concrete measures to achieve the agreed objectives. Mainly, EUGS aims to enhance the effectiveness of EU security and defence policy, including through increased cooperation among member states' armed forces and crisis management. Adopted by the Council of the EU in November 2016, the strategy emphasizes the importance of fostering resilience, adopting an integrated approach to conflict and crises, and enhancing strategic autonomy.[4]

Complementing the strategy was the implementation plan on security and defence, endorsed by the European Council in December 2016. This plan prioritizes three key strategic areas:

a) Responding to external conflicts and crises.
b) Building the capacities of partners.
c) Protecting the EU and its citizens (EU cooperation on security and defence 2023).

Concrete measures to achieve these objectives include the coordinated annual review on defence (CARD), permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), a military planning and conduct capability (MPCC), and the EU's rapid response toolbox.[5]

CARD seeks to enhance EU-level understanding of defence spending, national investment, and research endeavours. Its objective is to enhance transparency and political awareness regarding European defence capabilities, resulting in improved recognition of deficiencies, enhanced defence collaboration, more effective and cohesive defence expenditure planning.[6]

The Lisbon Treaty enables a subset of member states to enhance their collaboration on defence issues through the establishment of PESCO. The proposal was endorsed by the Council in December 2017. All EU member states are involved in PESCO, with the exception of Malta. Participating member states have agreed upon an initial roster of 17 projects to be pursued under PESCO. This list has since expanded to encompass 71 projects, addressing areas such as training, capability development, and operational readiness in the defence realm.[7]

Amidst a landscape characterized by an escalating array of multifaceted security challenges, the EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (EUSC) is poised to enhance the EU's capacity to address crises and threats in the coming decade. The EUSC prioritizes expediting and bolstering decisive action during crises; safeguarding citizens from swiftly evolving threats; investing in the requisite capabilities and technologies for the EU; and forging partnerships with external actors to attain shared objectives.[8]

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[3] *Ibidem.*
[4] *Ibidem.*
[5] *Ibidem.*
[6] *Ibidem.*
[7] *Ibidem.*
[8] *Ibidem.*

That being said, the EUSC, ratified in March 2022, one month after the start of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, delineates the specific actions the EU will take to bolster its role as a proficient, efficient, and accountable participant in security and defence, aiming to safeguard the security and prosperity of its citizens while contributing more efficiently to global peace and stability. Central to the EU's international outlook is the notion of accomplishing these objectives through collaboration with others. In summary, the EUSC plans a consolidation of the European security and defence policy with a time horizon of 2030. The arguments in favour of a new momentum regarding EU security and defence are compelling: a more hostile environment and broader geopolitical trends dictate that the EU must take greater responsibility for its own security.[9]

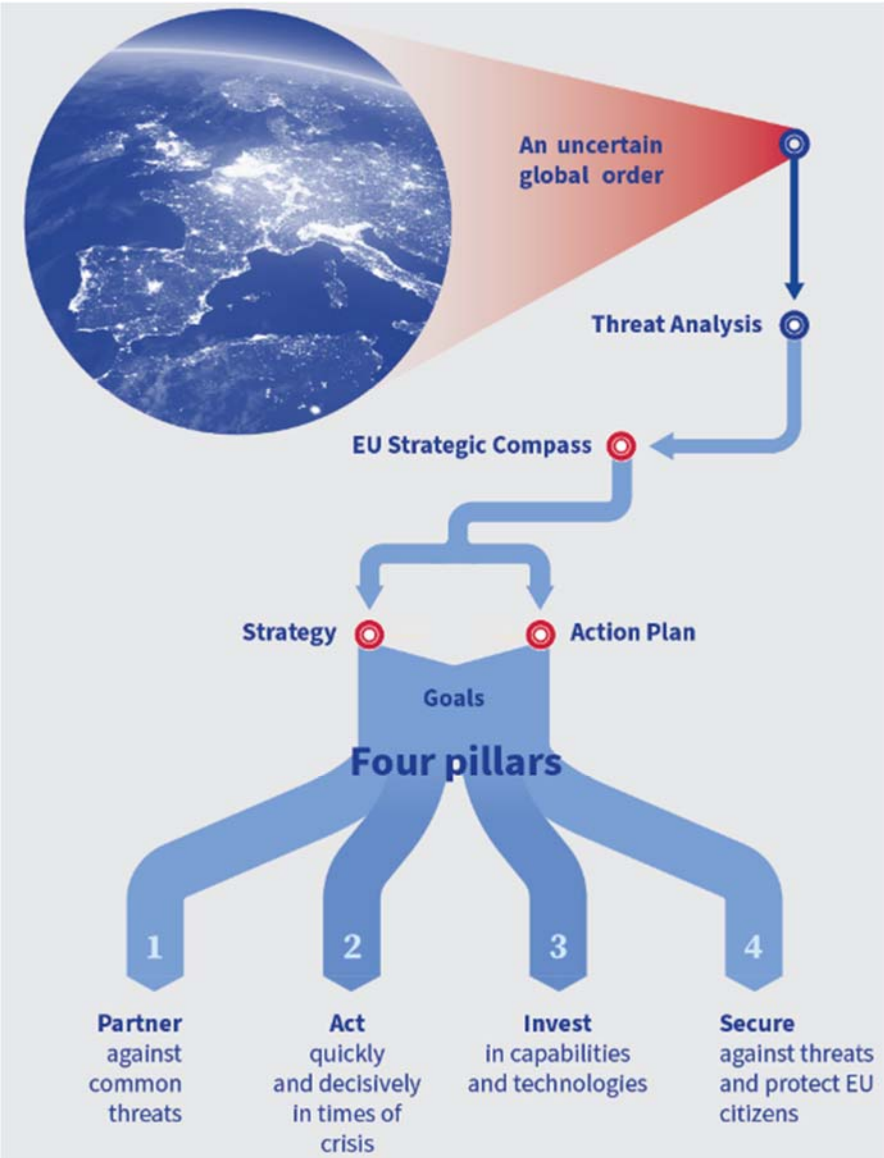


Figure no. 1 - Infographic - A Strategic Compass for the EU (European Council 2022)

Table no. 1 – Analysis of the achieved goals of the EUSC (Author 2024)

[9] EEAS, "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence," n.d. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en, p. 13.

EUSC pillars	Proposed goals in 2022	Achieved goals by 2024
1. Partner	➢ enhanced cooperation with NATO, United Nations (*UN*), Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (*OSCE*), African Union (*AU*), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (*ASEAN*); ➢ more tailor-made approaches in security and defence; ➢ a new security and defence partnerships forum to bring together multilateral, regional and bilateral partners.	✓ close cooperation with UN, OSCE, AU and ASEAN. ✓ Third Joint Declaration on EU-NATO cooperation. ✓ deepened security and defence dialogues with partners, including US, Norway, Canada, Switzerland, Iceland. ✓ Eastern Partnership: European Peace Facility (*EPF*)[10] support to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia (European Peace Facility: Council adopts assistance measures to support the defence sector of the Republic of Moldova and Georgia 2023); ✓ Western Balkans: EPF support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Balkan Medical Task Force (European Peace Facility: Council adopts assistance measures in support of the armed forces of five countries 2022); ✓ Africa: EPF support to the African Union's Peace Support Operations as well as armed forces of Mozambique, Mauritania, and Niger (European Peace Facility: Council adopts assistance measures in support of the armed forces of five countries 2022); ✓ Indo-Pacific: naval exercises between Operation Atalanta, India, and Indonesia. ✓ First Schuman Security and Defence Forum (20-21 March 2023); ✓ expansion of the networks of military advisors and counterterrorism experts in EU Delegations.
2. Act	➢ a new action plan on military mobility; ➢ 5000 troops to form a European Union Rapid Capacity;	✓ adoption of a new Military Mobility Action Plan 2.0 for the period 2022-2026.

[10] The EPF was established in March 2021 to finance the CFSP actions in the areas of military and defence, with the aim of preventing conflict, preserving peace and strengthening international security and stability. In particular, the European Peace Facility allows the EU to finance actions designed to strengthen the capacities of non-EU countries and regional and international organisations relating to military and defence matters. See more in "European Peace Facility: Council Adopts Assistance Measures to Support the Defence Sector of the Republic of Moldova and Georgia," May 4, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/05/04/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-assistance-measures-to-support-defence-sector-of-the-republic-of-moldova-and-georgia/.

	➢ 200 fully equipped CSDP mission experts to be deployed within 30 days, including in complex environments; ➢ regular exercises to further strengthen mutual assistance in case of an armed aggression;	✓ preparations of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity, including on its detailed tasks, composition, and financial aspects, have progressed throughout 2022 and 2023, with the aim of reaching full operational capability by 2025 (EU Rapid Deployment Capacity 2023, 1); ✓ new Civilian CSDP Compact with the commitment that in 2027, the EU will be able to deploy 200 experts within 30 days (Civilian CSDP Compact 2023, 20); ✓ new military Assistance Mission to train Ukrainian soldiers (EUMAM); ✓ new civilian Mission in Armenia (EUMA) to contribute to long-term stability in the border areas of Armenia; ✓ new military partnership Mission in Niger (EUMPM) to support the country in its fight against terrorist groups; ✓ extensive use of European Peace Facility, including €3.6 billion for military support to Ukraine; ✓ first two operational scenarios in support of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity.
3. Invest	➢ a renewed focus on the joint development of next generation capabilities; ➢ additional incentives to stimulate member states' collaborative investments in joint projects and procurements; ➢ creation of a Defence Innovation Hub in the European Defence Agency (*EDA*); ➢ an exchange on member states national objectives on increased and improved spending.	✓ increase of defence expenditure in the EU (€214 billion in 2021 and estimated additional €70 million by 2025). ✓ Analysis of Defence Investment Gaps. ✓ Task Force set up to consolidate Member States' most urgent needs and prepare the ground for joint procurement. ✓ proposal of €500 million instrument to incentivise collaborative procurement (EDIRPA). ✓ new EDA's Innovation Hub and launch of EU Defence Innovation Scheme (€2 billion). ✓ First Annual Meeting of Defence ministers on Capabilities.

4. Secure	➢ a revised EU threat analysis by the end of 2022. ➢ a new EU Hybrid Toolbox for the coordinated response to hybrid campaigns. ➢ a new EU space strategy for security and defence. ➢ a strengthened EU Satellite Centre to boost the EU's autonomous geo-spatial intelligence capacity; ➢ securing access to strategic domains: high seas, outer space, cyber space and air.	✓ updated EU threat analysis to continue building a common strategic culture. ✓ operationalisation of the EU hybrid toolbox. ✓ first EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence. ✓ SatCen framework agreement with Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and Spain. ✓ a PESCO project led by Germany (Common Hub for Governmental Imagery) will be used by EU to develop a Common Hub to receive these images coming from these different sources. ✓ new EU Policy on Cyber Defence to protect, detect, defend, and deter cyber-attacks. ✓ new Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union. ✓ updated EU Maritime Security Strategy. ✓ EEAS Crisis Response Centre created.

*Note: green – the goal is completed; yellow – the goal is due to be fully completed.

As we could see the first pillar of EUSC "Partner" (table no. 1), Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) continues to be a fundamental component of the EU's approach to its neighbouring regions. It facilitates sustainable development along the EU's external borders, contributes to narrowing disparities in living standards, and addresses shared challenges across these borders. Its significance was initially acknowledged in the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument regulation for the period 2007-2013. This recognition was reaffirmed for the period 2014-2020 in the European Neighbourhood Instrument, regulation, which was adopted in March 2014.[11]

The strategic significance of CBC cannot be overstated. CBC fosters collaboration among EU member states and neighbouring countries that share a land border or maritime crossing. Additionally, funding can be allocated for programmes involving multiple EU and neighbouring countries that are, for instance, situated within the same maritime basin.

Because of its distinctive role in EU external relations, CBC is highlighted in the EUSC, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and its regional aspects, particularly in the

[11] "Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council," 2014, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2014:077:0027:0043:EN:PDF#:~:text=This%20Regulation%20establishes%20a%20European,a%20special%20relationship%20founded%20on.

Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods, as well as in the EU's bilateral engagements, including with Russia.[12]

ENP, launched in 2003 and developed throughout 2004, was revised in 2015 and places particular emphasis on promoting people-to-people contacts, a goal to which existing CBC programmes directly contribute. The ENP review has defined updated shared priorities for cooperation that are more aligned with the contemporary challenges and responsive to regional changes. Alongside the traditional focus on good governance, democracy, rule of law, and human rights, three additional sets of shared priorities have been identified, encompassing a broad range of cooperation sectors: economic development for stability, the security aspect, and migration and mobility.[13]

ENP regulates the EU's interactions with 16 of its nearest neighbours in the Eastern and Southern regions. In the Southern direction: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine,[14] Syria,[15] Tunisia; and in the Eastern direction: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus,[16] Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations 2024).

ENP embodies the EU's desire to leverage shared interests with neighbouring countries and their mutual commitment to collaborate in critical priority areas: advancing democracy, upholding the rule of law, safeguarding fundamental rights and freedoms, promoting economic and social cohesion, and ensuring environmental protection. The ENP aims to foster stronger partnerships between the EU and its neighbours, fostering a stable EU Neighbourhood in political, security, and socio-economic terms. A key priority is enhancing the resilience of the EU's partners, both at the state and societal levels, against the threats and pressures they face, which also have implications for the EU.

ENP reflects the EU's wish to build on common interests with partner countries and commitment to work jointly in key priority areas, including in the promotion of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, and social cohesion. Through the ENP, the EU offers partner countries potential greater access to the EU's market and regulatory framework, standards and internal agencies and programmes.

Between 2021 and 2027, the EU backs the implementation of the ENP policy through the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI – Global Europe). The total allocation for the NDICI – Global Europe stands at EUR 79.462 billion (2021 prices), with EUR 19.3 billion designated for the Neighbourhood. The NDICI – Global Europe instrument succeeds the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), which served as the primary financial mechanism for implementing the ENI from 2014 to 2020, with an overall allocation of EUR 15.4 billion. It builds upon the progress made under the previous European

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[12] Russia engages in CBC initiatives within the framework of the ENP, although it is not formally a participant in the ENP itself.

[13] European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), "European Neighbourhood Policy," April 4, 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy_en.

[14] The assignment of this status should not be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the State of Palestine, and it does not prejudice the independent positions of the Member States on this matter.

[15] EU Cooperation with Syria is presently halted owing to the political circumstances.

[16] Belarus ceased its involvement in the Eastern Partnership as of June 2021. Starting from October 2020, the EU has gradually implemented restrictive measures in reaction to events unfolding in Belarus.

Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, which covered the period from 2007 to 2013.[17] Additionally, multiannual indicative programmes serve as strategic roadmaps for the period 2021-2027. They outline cooperation priorities derived from the Joint Documents and can only be finalized following the adoption of such documents. In cases where Joint Documents are not established with a partner country, cooperation proceeds based on annual special measures. Moreover, neighbourhood countries are eligible to participate in EU programmes, such as Erasmus+, in accordance with the NDICI-GE Regulation, utilizing funding from geographic envelopes. Bilateral cooperation with most neighbourhood countries is guided by Joint Documents (Partnership Priorities, Association Agendas, or similar frameworks). These agreements are reached among the partner country, the EU, and its Member States, establishing the political and economic priorities for cooperation.

In other words, the updated ENP is grounded in the principles of partnership, differentiation, flexibility, joint ownership, increased involvement of EU Member States, and shared responsibility. Through the ENP, the EU provides partner countries with opportunities to gain greater access to the EU's market, regulatory framework, standards, internal agencies, and programmes.

The Eastern Partnership

As a specific Eastern dimension of the **ENP**, the EaP combines bilateral and multilateral tracks. Launched in 2009, the EaP is a joint initiative between the EU countries and the eastern European partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Promoting CBC among the Eastern neighbouring countries is also a vital aspect of the EaP and various other multilateral initiatives such as the Black Sea Synergy and Northern Dimension. CBC plays a crucial role in enhancing exchanges and collaboration between the EU and neighbouring partner countries, as well as between partners and their local and regional authorities. Currently, the EU holds regional and urban policy dialogues with the following EaP countries: Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia. These dialogues serve to share international policy expertise to benefit policymakers from regions and cities on both sides, offer networking opportunities for EU regions and cities to engage in broader cooperation with partner countries, and showcase the EU's model of regional and urban development.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine also became enlargement countries in 2022, the European Council giving the three a European perspective and granting Moldova and Ukraine candidate status on 23 June 2022. It enables partner countries interested in moving towards the EU and increasing political, economic, and cultural links to do so. It is underpinned by a shared commitment to international law and fundamental values - democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms - and to the market economy, sustainable development, and good governance.

On 2 July 2021, the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy set out the Eastern Partnership: a Renewed Agenda for cooperation with the EU's Eastern partners. It builds on the Joint Communication Eastern Partnership

[17] *Ibidem.*

policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all (March 2020) and the Joint Staff Working Document Recovery, resilience, and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities (July 2021). It is underpinned by an Economic and Investment plan. The Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers meeting of 12 December 2022 confirmed the EU's commitment to EaP, and willingness to make it more flexible and tailored to the needs of partners. Complementarity should be ensured between the bilateral track and the enlargement process.

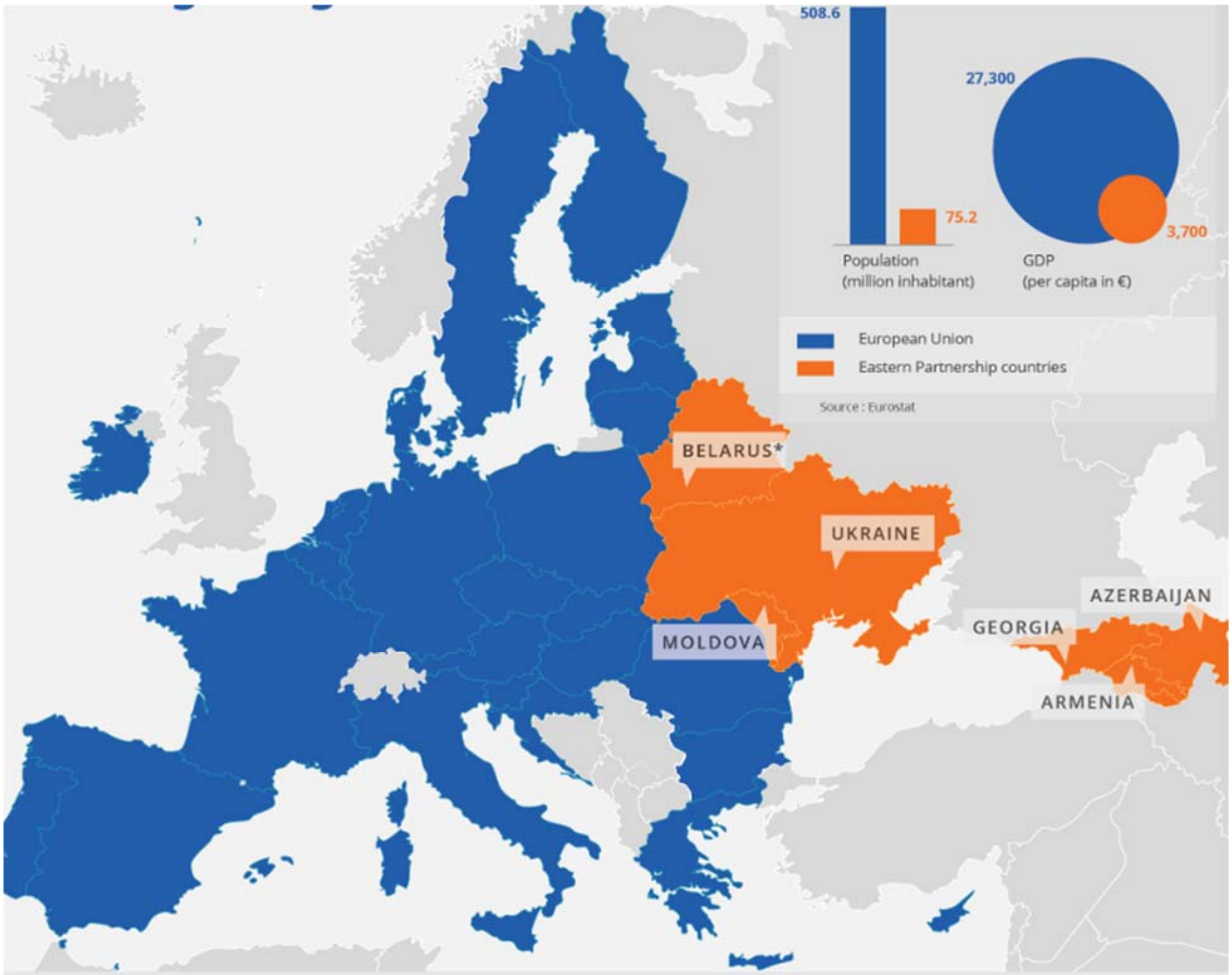


Figure no. 2 - The Eastern Partnership population and GDP (European Council 2021)



Figure no. 3 – Priorities areas of EU's cooperation with EaP [18]

[18] Naja Bentzen, Jakub Przetacznik, "Eastern Partnership 3.0. Principles, Priorities, and Prospects," Brussels, 2020, pp. 5-6, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/651966/EPRS_IDA(2020)651966_EN.pdf.



Figure no. 4 – Key milestones[19]

In line with the five policy objectives (fig. no. 2), these priorities will strengthen resilience of the partners countries by investing in two pillars.

Figure no. 5 – The EaP's pillars of investments[20]

Figure no. 5 – The EaP's pillars of investments[21]

[19] European Council, "Towards Stronger Eastern Partnership," 2021, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/towards-stronger-eastern-partnership/.

[20] DG NEAR, "An Eastern Partnership That Delivers for All," 2021, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ff0daa15-509c-4d33-9fc9-929f559143c1_en?filename=eap_future_priorities_eng.pdf.

[21] *Ibidem.*

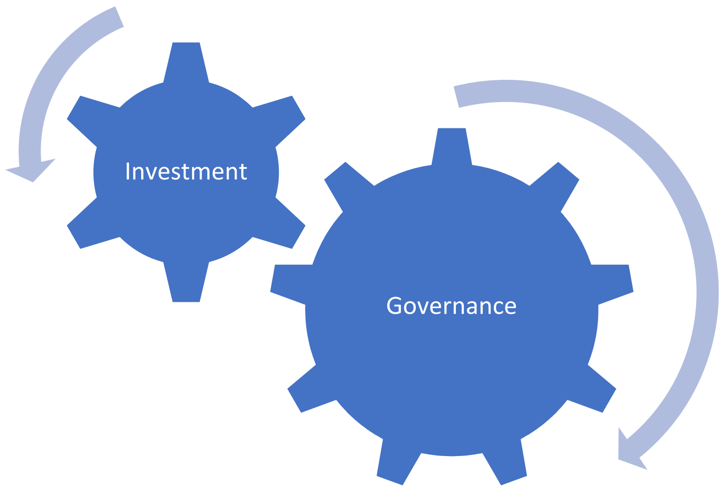


Figure no. 5 – The EaP's pillars of investments[22]

The first pillar – investment- has the role to support post-COVID 19 socio-economic recovery and build back better through accelerating the green and digital transition in the partner countries. This includes an Economic and Investment Plan with country-specific flagship initiatives. The second one – governance – is Investing in reforms and respect for shared fundamental values are at the core of our partnership. This includes support for democracy, human rights, rule of law reforms, support for the fight against corruption, gender equality, support to civil society and independent media.[23]

Apart from the conflict in Ukraine, Europe grapples with an unfriendly security climate, a growing array of threats, and intensified geopolitical rivalry. Now more than ever, the current global landscape necessitates unwavering commitment to the diligent pursuit of the ambitious, yet attainable goals EU has established.

The new and comprehensive agenda of EaP comprises a number of top ten targets for 2025 with the highest transformational impact for citizens and businesses have been identified as future priority actions - together with the country flagships.

[22] *Ibidem.*
[23] *Ibidem.*



Figure no. 6 - Top 10 targets for 2025[24]

Concrete Steps of Managing the Security in EU'S Eastern Neighbourhood

[24] *Ibidem.*

The current disruption to peace and stability in Europe remains a pressing and delicate concern, as unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine has been unfolding at the eastern borders of the EU since February 2022. Russia's actions constitute a gross violation of international law and the principles outlined in the UN Charter, posing a threat to both European and global security and stability.

As we could see in table no. 1, the EU has taken several important steps in the last two years to support its eastern neighbourhood. Our analysis will look closely at support for the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine.

Since 2021, the EU has adopted three assistance measures at a cost of €87 million under the EPF to support the Moldovan Armed Forces with the purchase of non-lethal equipment and services intended to strengthen medical, engineering, logistics, tactical communications, unmanned aerial surveillance, command and control, mobility and cyber-defence units.[25]The Moldovan Armed Forces comprise just 6,500 personnel divided into a Land Forces Command and an Air Forces Command, both equipped with Soviet-era weapons.

This financial support from the EU has made it possible for the Moldovan government to reallocate funds for the purchase of equipment from its western partners on a bilateral basis, such as the GM 200 Radar System from France and Piranha IIIH armoured personal carriers from Germany, as well as drones, ammunition, and other equipment from various countries.[26] It has also made it possible to end the chronic underinvestment in the Moldovan armed forces by increasing the defence budget in 2023 by 68.2 per cent to around €85 million, albeit still at a modest level of 0.55% of GDP.[27] However, the new National Security Strategy (*NSS*) foresees a gradual increase in budget allocations for national defence, with the aim of reaching 1% of GDP in the current decade.

The potential erosion of Ukraine's independence and sovereignty resulting from a hypothetical military defeat against Russia also poses a significant threat to Moldova's existence as an independent, sovereign, and democratic state. Russian hybrid warfare against Moldova encompasses various tactics, including pressure, disinformation campaigns, support for unrest and anti-government protests, illicit financing of political entities and opposition figures, and even attempts to orchestrate a *coup d'état*[28]. Moreover, Moscow maintains control over the separatist Transnistria region, where it operates a military group against the will of Chişinău.

[25] European Council, "Moldova: EU Launches Civilian Mission to Strengthen the Resilience of the Security Sector in the Areas of Crisis Management and Countering Hybrid Threats," May 22, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/05/22/moldova-eu-launches-civilian-mission-to-strengthen-the-resilience-of-the-security-sector-in-the-areas-of-crisis-management-and-countering-hybrid-threats/.

[26] Jakob Hedenskog, "Strengthening Resilience in Moldova Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies Report no. 19/2023, December 20, 2023, https://sceeus.se/en/publications/strengthening-resilience-in-moldova-following-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/.

[27] Kamil Całus, "Moldova: Enhancing Military Cooperation with the West," September 25, 2023, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-09-25/moldova-enhancing-military-cooperation-west.

[28] A sudden decisive exercise of force in politics. especially the violent overthrow or alteration of an existing government by a small group, see more in "Merriam-Webster," 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coup%20d%27%C3%A9tat#:~:text=%3A%20a%20sudden%20decisive%20exercise%20of,government%20by%20a%20small%20group.

In response to Russia's persistent threat, Moldovan authorities have undertaken measures to reduce dependency on Russia and bolster resilience. Resilience, as defined in a NATO context, refers to the ability to prepare for, withstand, respond to, and swiftly recover from shocks and disruptions.[29] An important step in enhancing Moldova's conceptual understanding of state functions has been the development of a new NSS. To increase integration with the EU on resilience matters, Moldova has sought to enhance the capabilities of its armed forces. This involves improving their ability to assist civilians during crises or emergencies and contributing to military missions and operations under the EU CSDP.

Support from the EU is also strengthening Moldova's resilience against hybrid threats. In April 2023, at the request of the Moldova government, the EU established the EU Partnership Mission (*EUPM*), under the CSDP, in Chişinău, the first ever civilian CSDP mission in Moldova. The aim of the mission is to enhance the resilience of the security sector in crisis management, while also enhancing resilience to hybrid threats in the area of cybersecurity, and countering foreign information manipulation and interference.[30]

The need to increase Moldova's resilience to Russian hybrid threats, such as electoral influence, propaganda, and disinformation, and to counter Russian attempts to fuel and exploit social and regional divisions is urgent as Moldova enters a crucial electoral cycle with local elections in November 2023 followed by a presidential election in 2024 and parliamentary elections in 2025. Given the experience of Russian attempts to interfere in the most recent local elections, which included inciting anti-government protest, establishing, and illegally funding the "fake" Chance Party, and illegal payments to local public administrations in the regions, the coming elections are likely to be very tough.

Again, in Georgia's case, the EU is largest donor. The EU will provide €340 million in grants to Georgia for the period 2021-2024, which will be supplemented by additional regional and thematic programmes, as well as funding in the form of loans and guarantees (The European Union and Georgia n.d.). That being said, an assistance measure adopted by the Council worth €30 million will cover a period of 36 months, and finance non-lethal equipment, supplies and services, to the units of the Georgian Defence Forces, including technical training where requested. The approved equipment includes engineering, command, and control, medical, logistics and cyber-defence equipment.[31] The assistance was requested by Georgia on 8 February 2023, and complements the €20 million assistance measure adopted in December 2022 and the €12.75 million one adopted in December 2021.[32]

[29] NATO, "Resilience, Civil Preparedness and Article 3," August 2, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm.

[30] European Council, "Moldova: EU Launches Civilian Mission to Strengthen the Resilience of the Security Sector in the Areas of Crisis Management and Countering Hybrid Threats," May 22, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/05/22/moldova-eu-launches-civilian-mission-to-strengthen-the-resilience-of-the-security-sector-in-the-areas-of-crisis-management-and-countering-hybrid-threats/.

[31] *Idem*, "European Peace Facility: Council Adopts Assistance Measures to Support the Defence Sector of the Republic of Moldova and Georgia," May 4, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/05/04/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-assistance-measures-to-support-defence-sector-of-the-republic-of-moldova-and-georgia/.

[32] *Ibidem*.

Atlantic Council experts share their insights about a decision in Brussels means called "Ukraine Facility". Subsequently, the Commission will allocate up to €50 billion in grants and highly concessional loans for Ukraine. This vital funding will support Ukraine in maintaining its administration, covering salaries, pensions, and delivering essential public services, as it perseveres in defending itself against Russia's aggression.[33] Moreover, the financial assistance will help Ukraine recover, reconstruct, and reform, on the country's path to EU membership.

Daniel Fried, the distinguished Weiser Family fellow at the Atlantic Council and a former US assistant secretary of state for Europe, concurs that the agreement demonstrates the EU's capacity to achieve challenging objectives despite its intricate structure and convoluted procedures. The fact that Europe is now providing more support to Ukraine than the United States illustrates that it is far from the "free-loader" status asserted by former President Donald Trump and his neo-isolationist allies. In Fried's view, the recently approved package serves two purposes: in the short term, the funds will stabilize Ukraine's government services and its war-affected economy to ensure continuity. In the long term, "the Facility" provides stability for Kyiv and assists Ukraine in implementing necessary domestic reforms crucial for progress towards eventual EU membership.[34]

Similar to Fried, Jörn Fleck, the senior director at the Atlantic Council's Europe Centre, believes this agreement sends a significant message to Washington that Europe is committed to supporting Ukraine in the long run. Although discussions on aid packages to Ukraine coincidentally occurred simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic last December and now, Fleck acknowledges that Europe missed an opportunity to influence the US debate at that time but has now succeeded, demonstrating to Washington that Europe is fulfilling its obligations. Moreover, he agrees that while the EU's processes may be chaotic and ineffective at times, diplomacy remains effective.[35]

According to Shelby Magid, the deputy director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Centre, this unified agreement by the EU represents both a significant financial measure and a symbolic display of political backing. She dismisses notions of "Ukraine fatigue," emphasizing that Europe's continued support sends a crucial message to Kyiv, Moscow, and the global community. Contrary to narratives suggesting otherwise, this decision is pivotal for Ukraine's defence efforts and conveys essential messaging in the battle of wills. The

[33] European Commission, "European Leaders Decide to Open Accession Negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova in a Historic Summit," December 18, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ac_23_6711.

[34] Daniel Fried, "Experts React: The EU Just Approved a 50 Billion Euro Aid Package for Ukraine. How Will It Impact the War?," Atlantic Council, February 1, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/experts-react-the-eu-just-approved-a-50-billion-euro-aid-package-for-ukraine-how-will-it-impact-the-war/.

[35] Jörn Fleck, "Experts React: The EU Just Approved a 50 Billion Euro Aid Package for Ukraine. How Will It Impact the War?," Atlantic Council, February 1, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/experts-react-the-eu-just-approved-a-50-billion-euro-aid-package-for-ukraine-how-will-it-impact-the-war/.

Kremlin has long aimed to outlast Western resolve and support for Ukraine, but Europe's decision today serves as a stark reminder that Putin's aspirations do not align with reality.[36]

Rachel Rizzo, a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Europe Centre, considers this accomplishment "laudable". Nevertheless, she believes that the EU's success also underscores a broader point: that effective pressure from influential states within the bloc can yield results when applied appropriately.[37]

To summarise, the Atlantic Council experts collectively emphasize the significance of the EU's unified agreement in providing financial support and political backing to Ukraine. They highlight the effectiveness of pressure from influential member states within the EU and stress the importance of continued support for Ukraine amidst geopolitical challenges. Moreover, the experts also express concern about any the reluctance from the US government to continue supporting Ukraine against Russia's threat. suggest that the EU's attitude of providing financial support to Ukraine could serve as a potential model for the US government. They imply that such support demonstrates a commitment to standing by Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression and highlights the importance of international solidarity in addressing regional security challenges.

On February 8th, 2024, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) hosted an event to introduce the outcomes of its Eastern Partnership Index 2023, which was created with financial backing from the European Commission. As Russia's aggression against Ukraine enters its second year this February, the findings of the EaP Index strongly reflect the overarching theme of the war and its repercussions across all six EaP countries.[38]

The EaP Index 2023 has emerged as a valuable resource for individuals interested in the EaP region, including policymakers in Brussels and EU member states, national authorities in the EaP countries, media, academia, and civil society both within and beyond the EaP region and the EU. Through the Index, countries receive scores and rankings, serving as initial reference points that enable readers to explore specific countries, thematic areas, or more, and gain insight into national and regional contexts.

In the 2023 edition of the Index, Moldova secures the top spot while Ukraine follows closely in second place, indicating notable advancements toward EU reform objectives despite the ongoing war and its widespread ramifications across all societal domains within the geopolitically intricate regional context.

Despite attaining EU candidate status in November 2023, Georgia's third place ranking in the Index reflects a significant decline in governance quality and the rule of law, accompanied by prevalent political polarization. Armenia maintains a stable fourth position, signalling some indications of stalled reform efforts and potential democratic regression.

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[36] Shelby Magid, "The EU Just Approved a 50 Billion Euro Aid Package for Ukraine. How Will It Impact the War?," February 1, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/experts-react-the-eu-just-approved-a-50-billion-euro-aid-package-for-ukraine-how-will-it-impact-the-war/.

[37] Rachel Rizzo, "Experts React: The EU Just Approved a 50 Billion Euro Aid Package for Ukraine. How Will It Impact the War?," Atlantic Council, February 1, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/experts-react-the-eu-just-approved-a-50-billion-euro-aid-package-for-ukraine-how-will-it-impact-the-war/.

[38] Eastern Partnership Index. Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2023.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, ranked fifth, and Belarus, ranked sixth, persist as the lowest performers on the Index, underscoring their increasingly autocratic regimes and manipulation of legal mechanisms for political ends.[39]

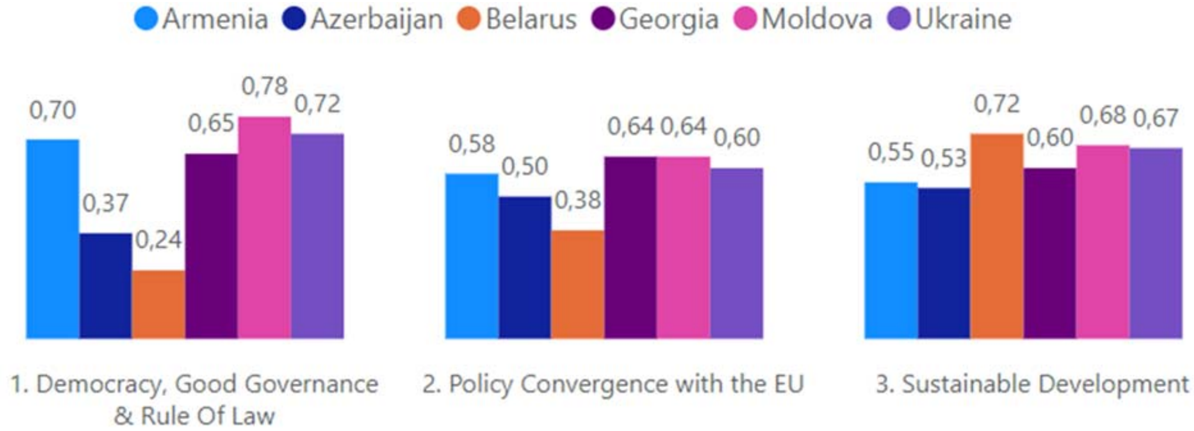


Figure no. 7 – How did EaP countries compare in different thematic areas in 2023? (EaP Index Dashboard 2023)

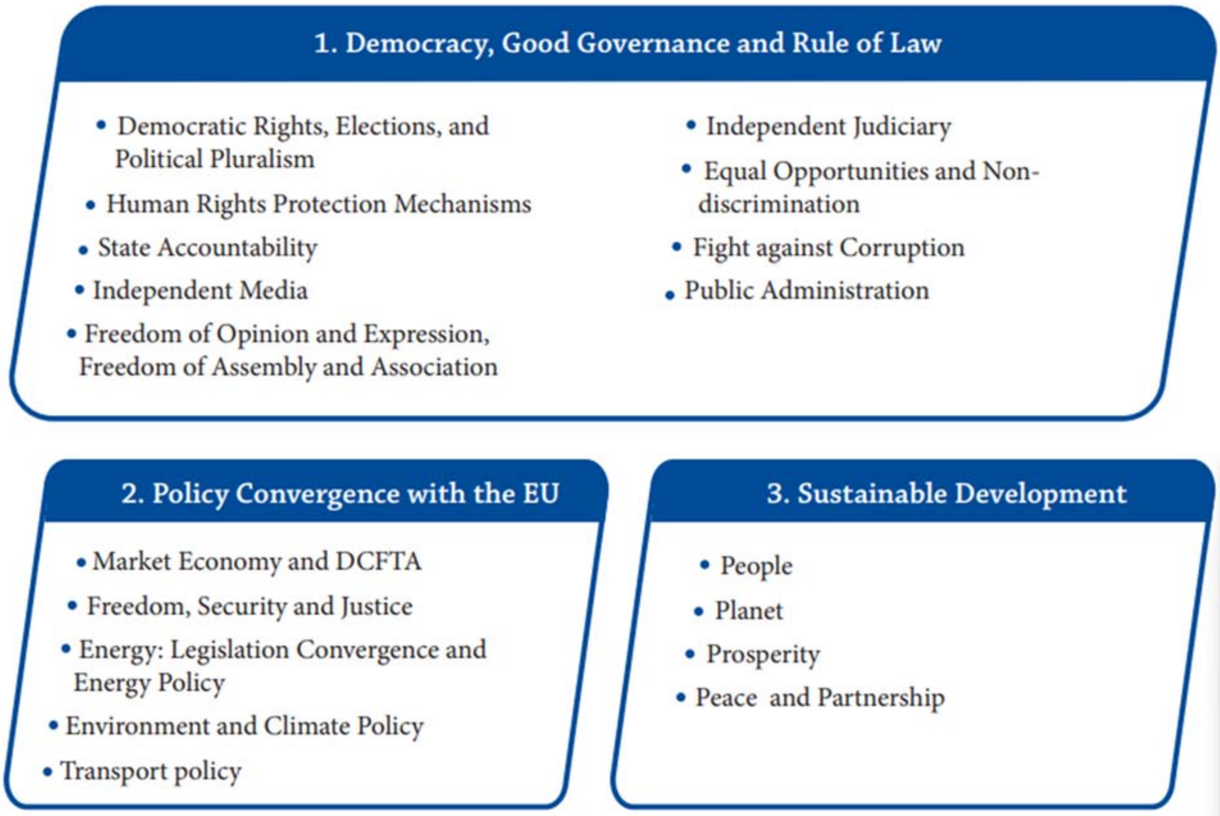


Figure no. 8 – The thematic areas detailed.[40]

Conclusions

EU's commitment to Eastern partners, especially in response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, has been further boosted. The EU candidate status and European perspective provide

[39] *Ibidem.*
[40] *Ibidem.*

a solid basis to deepen our cooperation agendas. The EU and its Member States have mobilised the entire scope of their instruments to support Ukraine and held fruitful security and defence dialogues and consultations with Georgia and Moldova and have provided both with concrete support through the EPF and other tools aiming to enhance their resilience, such as the hybrid threat survey.

For more than a decade, the EaP has been providing new opportunities for states to develop and achieve more ambitious foreign policy goals, and for citizens – hopes for designing more just and inclusive societies. This policy opened opportunities for broader cooperation with the EU while preserving the national interests of each country.

For Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership, in particular, has become an important platform for expressing European integration aspirations and preparing for the EU membership candidate status. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Brussels' constant contact with the governments of both countries facilitated the involvement of European institutions in establishing peace talks between them. In addition, the EaP at one time became a new framework for establishing and developing regional cooperation. The countries covered by this policy were united by a common course of reforms, similar project tasks and the formation of a new civil network. Europe and the world are no longer what they were when the EaP was launched. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine set out on the path with clear conditions for EU membership, highlighting the different approaches of regional actors to the policy's goals.

In today's world, competing visions and agendas on the global order are on the rise, challenging established multilateral rules and organisations. When States purposely undermine the international rules-based order, peace and stability are at risk. Even in peacetime, some states use a variety of hybrid instruments to undermine the sovereignty of those they see as their rivals. Non-state actors, too, can pose a threat to our security. In addition, new dimensions of warfare are adding complexity to already ongoing conflicts. As warring parties continue to send soldiers to the battlefield, they increasingly confront each other in cyberspace, for example.

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The Security Context over the Black Sea Region in the New Geopolitical Arrangements: Three Scenarios of North-South Cooperation.

Cătălin Gabriel Done

Abstract. The full-scale war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine represented a paradigm shift in terms of regional cooperation and European security. This war helped focus US and European attention on the region, with the Black Sea basin becoming a global security nexus.

The Allies' strategy for Europe changed radically after February 24, 2022, with NATO member states agreeing to strengthen Eastern flank defence and deterrence in Southeast Europe while the US expanded its military presence on the Continent. Given the fact that the North Atlantic alliance has decided to adopt a new strategic concept that identifies the Russian Federation as the most significant and direct threat to the security of the Allies and peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, a thorough analysis is needed of how the Black Sea region will approach the thematic framework of security, deep cooperation, and post-war reconstruction.

Thus, the present work aims to analyse three possible scenarios for the post-war phase of North-South strategic arrangements: a) Structural realism as forms of democratization and consolidation of peace and security, b) back to the future: neo-medievalism and regionalization concentric, c) imperial ideology and the class struggle: a Marxist perspective on the post-war era.

Keywords: Black Sea region, Ukraine war, North-South cooperation, NATO, Eastern flank

Introduction

The Black Sea region has historically been a crossroads of civilizations, cultures, and geopolitical interests, playing a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of European and Eurasian security.[1][2][3] However, the eruption of full-scale war initiated by the Russian Federation against Ukraine marked a significant paradigm shift in the region's security landscape. This conflict not only escalated tensions within Ukraine but also reverberated across the broader European security architecture, prompting a reassessment of strategic priorities and alliances.

The Russo-Ukrainian war, which commenced with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and further intensified in 2022, underscored the urgent need for enhanced cooperation among nations bordering the Black Sea. The aggression demonstrated by the Russian Federation highlighted the vulnerabilities of countries in the region and underscored the importance of collective security measures. In response to these challenges, there is a growing recognition among Baltic Sea countries, Black Sea littoral states, and Mediterranean nations of

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[1] Mădălina Tomescu and Liliana Trofin, "The Geopolitics of the Black Sea Basin," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* vol. 2, no. 1/2010, pp. 146–51.

[2] John P. LeDonne, "Geopolitics, Logistics, and Grain: Russia's Ambitions in the Black Sea Basin, 1737-1834," *The International History Review* vol. 28, no. 1/2006), pp. 1–41.

[3] Carol Weaver, *The Politics of the Black Sea Region: EU Neighbourhood, Conflict Zone or Future Security Community?*, London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

the imperative to bolster cooperation and solidarity in the face of Russian aggression and humanitarian crises.

The Black Sea basin has emerged as a focal point of global security concerns, drawing the attention of key stakeholders such as the United States and European Union.[4] The strategic significance of the region has been magnified by the escalating tensions between Russia and NATO, prompting a revaluation of defence strategies and alliance commitments. The need to fortify the Eastern flank defence and deterrence capabilities has become a central tenet of NATO's approach to safeguarding Europe's security architecture. Against this backdrop, the imperative for closer cooperation between Baltic Sea countries and those bordering the Black Sea and Mediterranean becomes increasingly evident. The shared security challenges posed by Russian aggression and humanitarian crises necessitate a coordinated and multifaceted response that transcends geographical boundaries. Strengthening ties between these regions can foster mutual understanding, facilitate information sharing, and enhance collective resilience against common threats.

Moreover, the humanitarian dimension of the crisis precipitated by the Russo-Ukrainian war underscores the urgent need for regional collaboration in addressing displacement, human rights abuses, and humanitarian emergencies. The influx of refugees fleeing conflict zones has strained resources and exacerbated social tensions, highlighting the interconnectedness of security, stability, and humanitarian concerns in the Black Sea region.

In light of these developments, this paper seeks to explore the potential for North-South cooperation among Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and Mediterranean countries in the context of Russian aggression and humanitarian crises. By analysing three distinct scenarios for post-war strategic arrangements, the paper aims to delineate possible pathways for enhancing security, fostering cooperation, and promoting peace and stability in the region. Through a nuanced examination of structural realism, neo-medievalism, and Marxist perspectives, the paper endeavours to provide insights into the complexities of the evolving security landscape and the prospects for sustainable regional cooperation.

Therefore, the challenges posed by Russian aggression and humanitarian crises in the Black Sea region underscore the imperative for enhanced cooperation and solidarity among neighbouring countries and neighbouring regions. By forging closer ties and adopting a collaborative approach to security challenges, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and Mediterranean nations can contribute to the preservation of peace and stability in Europe and beyond.

Security and Geopolitics for Europe

In the realm of global security, the Black Sea region occupies a crucial strategic position, serving as a nexus between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Its geopolitical significance stems from its unique geography, which connects multiple maritime routes, energy

[4] Valentin Naumescu, Raluca Moldovan (eds.), *Războiul. Consecințele invaziei rusești din Ucraina la nivel global, european și românesc* (The war. The consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for the world, Europe and Romania), Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023.

corridors, and transit networks.[5] As such, developments in the Black Sea have far-reaching implications for regional stability, international trade, and the broader security architecture.

One of the primary factors underpinning the strategic importance of the Black Sea is its role as a key transit hub for energy resources, particularly oil and natural gas.[6] The region is traversed by critical pipelines and shipping lanes that link resource-rich areas in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to markets in Europe and beyond.[7] Any disruption to energy flows through the Black Sea could have cascading effects on global energy markets, exacerbating geopolitical tensions and economic instability.[8] Furthermore, the Black Sea serves as a vital maritime corridor for trade and commerce, facilitating the movement of goods between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Its ports and shipping lanes are integral to the global supply chain, supporting the transportation of goods ranging from agricultural products to manufactured goods and raw materials. Ensuring the security and stability of maritime routes in the Black Sea is therefore essential for safeguarding international trade and economic prosperity.

In addition to its economic significance, the Black Sea region holds strategic importance from a military perspective. The presence of NATO member states, such as Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania, along its shores, as well as Russia's military presence in Crimea, has made the region a focal point of competition between major powers.[9] The deployment of military assets, including naval vessels, air bases, and missile systems, has heightened tensions and raised concerns about the potential for conflict escalation.[10] Moreover, the Black Sea region is characterized by a complex web of overlapping security interests and historical grievances, stemming from centuries of geopolitical competition and ethnic diversity. The legacy of past conflicts, including the Russo-Turkish wars and the collapse of the Soviet Union, continues to shape the security dynamics of the region, fuelling nationalist sentiments and territorial disputes. Against this backdrop, the Black Sea has emerged as a testing ground for competing visions of security and regional order. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the subsequent conflict in Eastern Ukraine have highlighted the fragility of the status quo and the inadequacy of existing security mechanisms. The lack of consensus among regional stakeholders on key issues, such as Crimea's status and the resolution of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, has further exacerbated tensions and undermined efforts to foster cooperation and

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[5] See Seth Cropsey et al., "Strategic Nexus: The Black Sea, Great Power Competition, and the Russo-Ukrainian War," Yorktown Institute, 2023, https://newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/YI_NSC_Monograph.pdf.

[6] Aura Sabadus, "Black Sea Energy Supply Risks Must Be Countered by a Coordinated Regional Response," RUSI, 2021, https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/black-sea-energy-supply-risks-must-be-countered-coordinated-regional-response.

[7] Ileana Racheru, Stanislav Secrieru, and Angela Grămadă, *Caucazul de Sud după 20 de ani: regimuri politice, securitate şi energie* (South Caucasus 20 years after: political regimes, security, energy), Bucureşti: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2012.

[8] Cătălin-Gabriel Done and Sorin Bogdea, "The Challenges of Niche Diplomacy in the Eastern Partnership Region. Case Study on Regional Energy Policies," *Europuls Policy Journal on EU Affairs* vol. 1, no. 1/2021, pp. 126–43.

[9] Ausrine Armonaite, "The Black Sea Region: Economic and Geo-Political Tensions," NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2020.

[10] The Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, The New Strategy Centre, and The Sofia Security Forum, "NATO`s Role in Addressing Security Threats and Challenges in the Black Sea: Time for a Comprehensive Strategic Approach for the Region?," 2023.

stability. Moreover, the Black Sea region is characterized by a complex array of non-traditional security challenges, including transnational crime, terrorism, and environmental degradation. The proliferation of illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, and piracy, poses significant risks to regional stability and human security. Similarly, environmental threats, such as pollution, overfishing, and natural disasters, have the potential to exacerbate social tensions and undermine the resilience of coastal communities.

In light of these challenges, addressing the security dynamics of the Black Sea region requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that takes into account the interconnected nature of security threats and the diverse interests of regional stakeholders. Enhancing cooperation and dialogue among Black Sea littoral states, as well as engaging with external actors such as NATO, the European Union, and the Russian Federation, will be essential for promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and beyond.

Romanian Factor and the Black Sea Region

Romania's strategic significance in the Black Sea region cannot be overstated, as it occupies a pivotal position as the second-largest country in the region and a member of both the EU and NATO. Its geographical location, bordering the Black Sea to the east and sharing borders with Bulgaria, Ukraine, Hungary, Serbia, and Moldova, places Romania at the crossroads of multiple regional dynamics and security challenges.

As a member of the EU and NATO, Romania plays a critical role in shaping the security architecture of Europe and the broader transatlantic community. Its participation in these organisations underscores its commitment to democratic values, collective defence, and regional cooperation. Romania's accession to NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007 marked significant milestones in its post-communist transition and integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Romania's track diplomacy capabilities have increasingly garnered attention on the international stage, as evidenced by its active engagement in regional and multilateral initiatives aimed at fostering cooperation and dialogue. The country has demonstrated a willingness to play a constructive role in mediating conflicts, promoting stability, and advancing shared interests in the Black Sea region and beyond. Its diplomatic efforts have focused on enhancing security cooperation, strengthening economic ties, and promoting people-to-people exchanges among neighbouring countries.

One of the key platforms through which Romania seeks to enhance inter-regional cooperation is the Three Seas Initiative (TSI). Conceived in 2015, the TSI aims to promote connectivity, infrastructure development, and economic integration among 12 EU member states located between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas. As a founding member of the TSI, Romania has been actively involved in advancing its objectives and leveraging its geographical position to foster greater cooperation and investment in critical sectors such as energy, transportation, and digital infrastructure.

Romania's strong aspiration for integration and influence within the EU and NATO reflects its commitment to upholding the principles of democracy, rule of law, and collective

security. As a staunch advocate for European and transatlantic unity, Romania has consistently supported efforts to strengthen the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and deepen NATO-EU cooperation. Its strategic alignment with Western institutions reflects a broader consensus within Romanian society regarding the country's geopolitical orientation and foreign policy priorities. Moreover, Romania's participation in multinational military exercises, joint training programmes, and defence cooperation initiatives with NATO allies underscores its commitment to collective defence and regional security. The country's strategic location along the eastern flank of NATO has positioned it as a key contributor to efforts aimed at deterring aggression, countering hybrid threats, and enhancing resilience against emerging security challenges.

In the context of the Black Sea region, Romania's role as a stabilizing force and catalyst for inter-regional cooperation is particularly significant. Its strong ties with neighbouring countries, such as Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Moldova, provide a foundation for enhancing security, promoting economic development, and addressing common challenges. Romania's support for initiatives aimed at bolstering regional infrastructure, energy security, and connectivity reflects its broader vision of a secure, prosperous, and integrated Black Sea community. Moreover, "Romania's vocation (given by our geography) is to be a gateway of Europe between East and West, between North and South, between the Eurasian area and the Middle East, and the future transatlantic single market. Militarily, economically, socially, and culturally."[11]

Furthermore, Romania's participation in the EU's Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Synergy frameworks underscores its commitment to enhancing cooperation and dialogue with countries in the Eastern neighbourhood. By leveraging its diplomatic, economic, and cultural resources, Romania seeks to contribute to the promotion of stability, democracy, and prosperity in the wider Black Sea region. Its efforts to support democratic reforms, foster people-to-people exchanges, and facilitate cross-border cooperation are indicative of its role as a responsible stakeholder in regional affairs.

A Cooperative System, A Multitude of Strategies

In the years preceding the Russo-Ukrainian war, the Black Sea region witnessed a complex interplay of alliance systems and security paradigms, shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical rivalries, and regional dynamics. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in a period of profound transformation, as newly independent states sought to redefine their security relationships and strategic orientations. Against the backdrop of these changes, the Black Sea region emerged as a contested space, where competing visions of security and cooperation intersected and clashed.

At the heart of the region's security architecture were two main alliance systems: NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). NATO, comprising Western

[11] Mircea Geoană, "Să ne punem geografia la treabă. România - Poarta Europei" (Let's make geography work for us. Romania - the gate of Europe), in *Bătălia Pentru Viitorul României. Gândurile Unui Român La Vârful NATO* (The battle for Romania's future. The reflections of a Romanian at NATO's top), București: Litera, 2023, p. 199.

European and North American countries, represented the dominant security framework in the Euro-Atlantic space, promoting collective defence, democratic values, and integration. In contrast, the CSTO, led by Russia and consisting primarily of former Soviet republics, sought to counterbalance NATO's influence and uphold Moscow's strategic interests in the post-Soviet space.

The enlargement of NATO and the EU eastward in the 2000s further complicated the security landscape of the Black Sea region. The accession of former Warsaw Pact countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria, to NATO in 2004, followed by their subsequent EU membership in 2007, marked a significant shift in the balance of power and raised concerns among Russia's political and military leadership. Moscow viewed NATO and EU expansion as a direct challenge to its sphere of influence and a threat to its strategic interests in the region. In response to NATO's eastward expansion and perceived encroachment on its traditional sphere of influence, Russia adopted a more assertive and confrontational approach to security in the Black Sea region. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent military intervention in Eastern Ukraine underscored Moscow's determination to safeguard its strategic interests and challenge the existing security order. These actions shattered the prevailing paradigm of cooperation and stability, plunging the region into a protracted conflict and exacerbating tensions between Russia and the West.

Prior to the Russo-Ukrainian war, efforts to promote security and cooperation in the Black Sea region were characterized by a mix of multilateral initiatives, bilateral partnerships, and regional dialogues. Platforms such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) sought to foster economic integration, political dialogue, and confidence-building measures among Black Sea littoral states. Additionally, NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme and the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) provided frameworks for engagement and cooperation with non-member states in the region. However, despite these initiatives, the prevailing security paradigm in the Black Sea region remained fragile and susceptible to external pressures and internal conflicts. The lack of comprehensive and inclusive security architecture, combined with unresolved territorial disputes and historical grievances, created fertile ground for instability and insecurity. The Russo-Ukrainian war represented a watershed moment that laid bare the vulnerabilities of the existing security arrangements and underscored the urgent need for a coordinated and cohesive response to emerging threats and challenges.

The Paradigm Shift: Impact of the Russo-Ukrainian War

The Russo-Ukrainian war, which erupted in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and escalated into a protracted conflict in Eastern Ukraine, represents a seismic shift in the security dynamics of the Black Sea region and beyond. This chapter examines the multifaceted impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war on regional cooperation, European security, and the broader international order. By analysing the origins, escalation, and consequences of the conflict, this chapter seeks to elucidate the underlying drivers of the paradigm shift in the security landscape of the Black Sea region.

The Russo-Ukrainian war has its roots in long-standing historical, geopolitical, and ethno-nationalistic tensions between Russia and Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 2014 marked a blatant violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, triggering a sharp escalation in hostilities and raising alarms across Europe and the international community. The subsequent outbreak of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, fuelled by separatist movements and covert Russian military intervention, further destabilized the region and deepened divisions between Russia and the West.

The impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war extends far beyond the borders of Ukraine, reverberating across the broader European security architecture and reshaping the geopolitical calculus of key stakeholders. The conflict served as a wake-up call for NATO and the EU member states, highlighting the fragility of the post-Cold War security order and the inadequacy of existing mechanisms for deterring aggression and safeguarding collective security. The annexation of Crimea and the on-going conflict in Eastern Ukraine prompted a reassessment of strategic priorities and alliance commitments, leading to a renewed focus on strengthening Eastern flank defence and enhancing deterrence measures in the Black Sea region.[12]

Moreover, the Russo-Ukrainian war exposed the limitations of traditional security paradigms and underscored the need for a more comprehensive and flexible approach to addressing emerging threats and challenges. The conflict blurred the lines between conventional and hybrid warfare, showcasing the use of disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks, and proxy forces to achieve strategic objectives and undermine adversaries. As a result, policymakers and analysts alike have been forced to grapple with the complexities of modern conflict and adapt their strategies and responses accordingly.

In addition to its immediate security implications, the Russo-Ukrainian war has had profound socio-economic, humanitarian, and geopolitical consequences for the Black Sea region and its inhabitants. The conflict has displaced millions of people, caused widespread destruction and suffering, and strained regional resources and infrastructure. Moreover, the annexation of Crimea and the on-going occupation of parts of Eastern Ukraine have fuelled ethnic tensions, exacerbated political divisions, and heightened fears of further escalation and instability.

In light of these developments, understanding the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war on the security dynamics of the Black Sea region is essential for formulating effective policies and strategies to address the root causes of conflict, promote reconciliation, and restore stability. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the origins, evolution, and consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian war, shedding light on its far-reaching implications for regional cooperation, European security, and the broader international order. By examining the lessons learned from the conflict and identifying opportunities for cooperation and conflict resolution, this chapter seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between geopolitics, security, and conflict in the Black Sea region.

[12] Derek Averre, "The Ukraine Conflict: Russia's Challenge to European Security Governance," *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 68, no. 4/2016, pp. 699–725.

The escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war to full-scale conflict in 2022 marked a pivotal moment in European security, sending shockwaves throughout the EU and deepening tensions between the EU and the Russian Federation. The intensification of hostilities, characterized by large-scale military offensives, indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas, and widespread human rights abuses, underscored the gravity of the situation and raised concerns about the potential for further escalation and destabilization in the region.

The EU's response to the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022 was swift and decisive, with member states rallying behind a unified stance against Russian aggression and violations of international law. The European Union imposed a series of targeted sanctions on Russia, including asset freezes, travel bans, and restrictions on access to EU markets, in an effort to deter further aggression and compel Moscow to de-escalate the conflict. Additionally, the EU provided political and diplomatic support to Ukraine, reaffirming its commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflict through diplomatic means.

The escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022 also had significant implications for the EU's broader security architecture and its relations with the Russian Federation. The conflict highlighted the vulnerability of EU member states to external threats and underscored the need for enhanced defence cooperation and strategic autonomy. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) came under renewed scrutiny, as member states sought to strengthen their collective defence capabilities and bolster resilience against hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns emanating from Russia.

Furthermore, the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022 strained the EU's already fragile relationship with the Russian Federation and exacerbated existing tensions between Brussels and Moscow. President Vladimir Putin's uncompromising stance and disregard for international norms and diplomatic overtures further alienated Russia from the EU and deepened mistrust between the two sides. The breakdown of diplomatic channels and the failure to achieve a negotiated settlement to the conflict underscored the profound ideological and strategic differences between the EU and the Russian Federation. This war also had implications for broader geopolitical dynamics, including Russia's relations with other major powers such as the United States and China. The conflict served as a litmus test for the international community's commitment to upholding the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and human rights, with implications for global stability and the rules-based international order. The EU's response to the conflict, in coordination with its transatlantic partners and like-minded allies, reflected a collective determination to defend the norms and values underpinning the liberal international order and deter further aggression by revisionist powers.

Find the balance: Consequences for Regional Cooperation and European Security

According to the United Nations "regional cooperation brings many of the same benefits as multilateralism but on a smaller scale. First, it enables participating countries to overcome the small size of their domestic markets and achieve economies of scale and greater

specialization in production, thus increasing the competitiveness of their products. Secondly, access to a larger market enables developing countries both to expand existing industries and to set up new export industries, diversifying exports and reducing their vulnerability to setbacks in a specific product market. Thirdly, regional cooperation can enhance the capacity of developing countries to meet emerging challenges, including the application of new technologies. Fourthly, it is increasingly clear that regional trade facilitation measures offer significant benefits by reducing the costs of transactions across international borders and removing non border obstacles."[13]

However, regional cooperation ensures not only economic prosperity but also a climate of peace and stability, as the involvement of various state actors in building a system of interdependencies provides the necessary mechanisms for resolving disputes through diplomatic and political means. The EU is such an example, as well as the Group of Seven. NATO, as a form of regional military cooperation, ensures the security of its members through advanced military posture, as well as by deterring threats and direct attacks. Therefore, regional cooperation involves high degrees of interconnectedness and interdependence, ensuring economic, political, social, and military interoperability. In the aftermath of the Russo-Ukrainian war and its escalation to a full-scale conflict, finding the delicate balance between cooperation and security becomes imperative for both regional stability and European security. Cooperation among states in the Black Sea region and beyond is essential to address common challenges, mitigate security threats, and promote sustainable peace and development. However, achieving this balance requires more complex geopolitical dynamics, overcoming grievances, and fostering trust and confidence among states and political stakeholders.

Cooperation among states in the Black Sea region is grounded in the principles of mutual benefit, shared responsibility, and collective security. By pooling resources, expertise, and capabilities, states can effectively address transnational threats such as terrorism, organised crime, and illicit trafficking, which pose significant challenges to civil security and societal well-being. Moreover, cooperation enables states to leverage each other's strengths and mitigate vulnerabilities, enhancing resilience against emerging security risks and unforeseen contingencies. In the context of European security, cooperation among member states of the European countries and NATO is essential to safeguarding the collective security of the continent.[14] The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) provides a framework for member states to coordinate their efforts and enhance their defence capabilities, while NATO's principle of collective defence ensures that an attack on one member is considered an attack on all. By fostering cooperation and solidarity among member states, these institutions contribute to the maintenance of peace, stability, and security in Europe. Furthermore, cooperation ensures state security by promoting confidence-building measures, dialogue, and

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[13] United Nations, "Meeting the Challenges in an Era of Globalization by Strengthening Regional Development Cooperation," 2004, p. 24, https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/front.pdf.

[14] Ştefan Popescu, *Uniunea Europeană După Epidemia de Covid-19: Încercare de Prospectivă* (The EU after the Covid-19 pandemic. A prospective analysis), Bucureşti: Litera, 2020.

diplomatic engagement among states.[15] By fostering mutual understanding and trust, cooperation reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings, miscalculations, and conflicts, thereby enhancing stability and reducing the risk of escalation. Moreover, cooperation provides a platform for addressing underlying grievances, resolving disputes, and building lasting peace and reconciliation among former adversaries.

In the Black Sea region, cooperation among littoral states is essential to addressing shared security challenges and promoting regional stability. Platforms such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) provide avenues for dialogue, cooperation, and confidence-building measures among Black Sea littoral states. These platforms enable states to address common concerns, such as maritime security, environmental protection, and economic development, through collaborative efforts and shared responsibilities. Additionally, cooperation ensures civil security by promoting the rule of law, respect for human rights, and good governance. By strengthening democratic institutions, promoting accountability, and upholding the rights and freedoms of citizens, states can create a conducive environment for peace, stability, and prosperity. Cooperation among states in the Black Sea region and beyond is essential to addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting inclusive development, and building resilient societies that can withstand internal and external threats. However, achieving the delicate balance between cooperation and security requires overcoming various obstacles and challenges. Historical grievances, territorial disputes, and divergent interests among states can impede cooperation and hinder progress towards common goals. Moreover, external interference, geopolitical rivalries, and great power competition can exacerbate tensions and undermine efforts to build trust and confidence among stakeholders.

To overcome these challenges, states must demonstrate political will, leadership, and commitment to dialogue and cooperation. Building trust and confidence among states requires sustained engagement, transparency, and respect for international norms and principles. Moreover, fostering cooperation requires addressing underlying grievances, promoting reconciliation, and creating incentives for cooperation through tangible benefits and shared interests.

So, finding the balance between cooperation and security is essential for promoting regional cooperation and enhancing European security in the aftermath of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Cooperation among states in the Black Sea region and beyond is essential to addressing shared security challenges, promoting stability, and safeguarding civil security.

Of course, the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war heightened the attention and strategic focus of both the United States and Europe on the security challenges in Eastern Europe.[16] Recognizing the need to bolster deterrence and reassure allies in the face of Russian aggression, the United States intensified its military presence in the region, deploying troops,

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[15] Jennifer D. P. Moroney, David E. Thaler, and Joe Hogler, "Characterizing Security Cooperation Mechanisms," in *Review of Security Cooperation Mechanisms Combatant Commands Utilize to Build Partner Capacity*, Washington DC: RAND Corporation, 2013, pp. 13–28.

[16] Ryszard Zięba, "EU and NATO Eastern Policy," in Ryszard Zięba (ed.), *Politics and Security of Central and Eastern Europe*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023, pp. 119–36.

equipment, and resources to Eastern European countries such as Poland and Romania. This increased attention from the US underscored the commitment of the transatlantic alliance to collective defence and security in the face of evolving threats and challenges.

Romania and Poland emerged as key outposts of European military presence in Eastern Europe, serving as strategic hubs for NATO's enhanced forward presence and rotational deployments. The deployment of US troops to Romania, Poland and the Baltics, as part of broader NATO efforts to strengthen deterrence and defence capabilities along the Alliance's eastern flank, signalled a clear message of solidarity and resolve to defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty of NATO member states. This enhanced military presence bolstered the security posture of both countries and contributed to the deterrence of potential adversaries in the region.

In Romania, increased attention from the US and Europe has led to the strengthening of the military capabilities of the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base as a key strategic asset for NATO operations in the Black Sea region and beyond. The air base serves as a logistical centre for US and NATO forces, facilitating rapid deployment and response capabilities in support of collective defence and security objectives. Additionally, Romania's strategic location along NATO's eastern flank makes it an essential partner in efforts to enhance situational awareness, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities in the Black Sea region. Similarly, Poland and the Baltics emerged as a linchpin of NATO's eastern flank defence strategy, with the deployment of US troops and equipment to Baltic territory bolstering their national defence capabilities and enhancing interoperability with NATO forces. Of course, the rotational presence of US troops in Poland, alongside the establishment of forward operating sites and prepositioned equipment, demonstrates the commitment of the United States and its allies to deterring aggression and defending NATO's eastern borders. Moreover, Poland's strong partnerships with the United States and its proactive stance on defence spending and modernization have positioned the country as a key contributor to NATO's collective efforts. The increased attention from the US and Europe also facilitated greater defence cooperation and interoperability between Romania, Poland, and other NATO allies. Joint military exercises, training programmes, and capacity-building initiatives have strengthened the ability of Romanian and Polish forces to operate effectively alongside their NATO counterparts and respond to a range of security threats and challenges. Moreover, the deepening of military ties between Romania and Poland, as well as with other NATO member states, has contributed to the development of a more integrated and cohesive security architecture in Eastern Europe.

To sum up, the increased attention from the US and Europe following the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war has transformed the Black Sea region and the Baltic region into key outposts of European military presence in Eastern Europe. Through the deployment of US and NATO troops and resources, both regions have enhanced their defence capabilities, bolstered deterrence, and contributed to the collective security and stability of the region. Moving forward continued regional cooperation and coordination between those two areas and their NATO allies will be essential to addressing evolving security threats and maintaining a strong and credible defence posture along NATO's eastern flank.

The Need for Analysis: Security, Cooperation, and Reconstruction in the Black Sea Region

As the dust settles in the aftermath scenarios of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the imperative for a comprehensive analysis of security, cooperation, and reconstruction in the Black Sea region becomes increasingly evident. The conflict has left a profound impact on the geopolitical landscape of the region, reshaping alliances, exacerbating tensions, and highlighting the fragility of existing security arrangements. In this context, understanding the evolving dynamics of the post-war era is essential for formulating effective policies and strategies to address the complex challenges facing the Black Sea region.

One of the key priorities in the post-war era is ensuring the security and stability of the Black Sea region. The conflict in Ukraine has heightened tensions and raised concerns about the potential for further instability and violence. As such, efforts to strengthen regional security cooperation, enhance military capabilities, and promote confidence-building measures are essential for preventing escalation and maintaining peace. Moreover, addressing underlying grievances, resolving territorial disputes, and promoting dialogue among regional stakeholders are critical for building trust and fostering a conducive environment for peace and stability. Cooperation among Black Sea littoral states is also crucial for addressing common security challenges and promoting regional integration and development. The Black Sea region is characterized by a complex web of overlapping interests and geopolitical rivalries, making cooperation essential for addressing shared concerns such as maritime security, energy transit, and environmental protection. By fostering dialogue, building trust, and promoting economic, political, and cultural exchanges, states can create a more resilient and interconnected Black Sea community.

Furthermore, reconstruction efforts in the wake of the conflict are essential for rebuilding infrastructure, restoring livelihoods, and promoting reconciliation in war-torn areas. The destruction caused by the conflict has had devastating consequences for local communities, displacing millions of people, disrupting essential services, and undermining social cohesion. Therefore, investing in reconstruction and development projects, providing humanitarian assistance, and supporting transitional justice mechanisms are essential for addressing the humanitarian crisis and laying the foundations for long-term stability and prosperity.

In the context of the post-war era, it is also crucial to consider the role of external actors in shaping the security dynamics of the Black Sea region. Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Eastern Ukrainian territories have highlighted Moscow's determination to assert its influence and protect its strategic interests in the region. As such, understanding Russia's motivations, intentions, and capabilities is essential for formulating effective policies and strategies to manage and mitigate potential security risks and challenges.

Transitioning to the scenarios section, it is imperative to explore alternative futures for the Black Sea region in the post-war era. By examining different scenarios and assessing their implications for security, cooperation, and reconstruction, policymakers and analysts can better understand the range of possible outcomes and identify opportunities and challenges for regional peace and stability. From structural realism to neo-medievalism and Marxist vision on

international relations, each scenario offers unique insights into the potential trajectories of the Black Sea region in the post-war era.

Understanding the three scenarios presented—structural realism, neo-medievalism, and Marxist analysis—in the context of multilateral cooperation in the post-war era is crucial for stakeholders and academia alike. Firstly, these scenarios provide a framework for analysing the potential trajectories of the multilateral regional security and cooperation dynamics. By exploring different theoretical perspectives, stakeholders can gain insights into the underlying drivers, risks, and opportunities associated with each scenario. This understanding enables policymakers, military strategists, and diplomats to anticipate future challenges and devise effective strategies to address them.

Secondly, the scenarios serve as valuable tools for scenario planning and risk assessment. By envisioning alternative futures and assessing their implications, stakeholders can identify potential vulnerabilities, threats, and areas of cooperation. This proactive approach allows for the development of contingency plans, crisis response mechanisms, and diplomatic initiatives to mitigate risks and capitalize on opportunities. Moreover, scenario planning fosters strategic foresight and adaptability, enabling stakeholders to navigate uncertainties and respond effectively to changing circumstances. Additionally, the scenarios offer a platform for dialogue, debate, and collaboration among stakeholders and academia. By engaging in scenario-based discussions, policymakers, scholars, and civil society actors can exchange perspectives, share insights, and identify areas of convergence and divergence. This interdisciplinary approach fosters mutual understanding, consensus-building, and innovative thinking, leading to more informed decision-making and policy formulation. Furthermore, scenario analysis encourages stakeholders to consider diverse viewpoints and challenge conventional wisdom, fostering a culture of critical thinking and intellectual curiosity.

Lastly, the scenarios provide a basis for empirical research and hypothesis testing in academia. Scholars can use the scenarios as theoretical frameworks for designing empirical studies, conducting field research, and testing hypotheses related to security, cooperation, and reconstruction in the North-South regions. By combining theoretical insights with empirical evidence, researchers can generate new knowledge, advance theoretical debates, and contribute to policy-relevant scholarship. This collaborative approach between academia and stakeholders enhances the relevance, rigor, and impact of research on the Black Sea region's post-war dynamics, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the region's complex security and cooperation challenges.

Structural Realism: Democratization and Consolidation of Peace and Security

Structural realism, also known as neorealism, is a prominent theory in international relations that emerged in the late 20th century as a response to classical realism. Developed primarily by scholars such as Kenneth Waltz,[17][18] structural realism seeks to explain the

[17] Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, Transferred to digital print, New York, NY: Routledge, 2009.
[18] *Idem*, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* vol. 25, no. 1/2000, pp. 5–41.

behaviour of states in the international system by focusing on the structure of the system itself rather than the individual characteristics or intentions of states. At the heart of structural realism is the notion of an anarchic international system, where there is no overarching authority to enforce rules or mediate disputes between states. In such a system, states are seen as rational actors motivated primarily by the desire to ensure their own survival and security. This emphasis on self-help and survival drives states to pursue strategies that maximize their relative power and position in the international hierarchy.[19]

Central to structural realism is the concept of the distribution of power among states in the international system. Waltz.[20][21]distinguishes between two main forms of power distribution: bipolarity, characterized by the presence of two dominant powers, and multi-polarity, characterized by the presence of multiple competing powers. According to structural realists, the distribution of power shapes the behaviour of states, influencing their alliances, strategies, and interactions with other states. In addition to the distribution of power, structural realism also emphasizes the role of the international system's structure in shaping state behaviour. Waltz underlined that the anarchic structure of the international system creates a self-help environment in which states must rely on their own capabilities to ensure their security. This structural constraint limits the potential for cooperation and fosters competition and conflict among states. Moreover, structural realism posits that states are primarily concerned with relative rather than absolute gains. In other words, states are more concerned with improving their position relative to other states than with maximizing their absolute gains. This zero-sum perspective on international relations underscores the competitive nature of the international system and highlights the importance of relative power dynamics in shaping state role.

Furthermore, structural realism suggests that states tend to balance against threats to their security rather than bandwagon with them. This balancing behaviour involves states taking measures to counteract the power and influence of potential rivals, either through military build-ups, alliances, or diplomatic manoeuvres. By balancing against potential threats, states seek to preserve their own security and maintain the stability of the international system. However, structural realism does not discount the possibility of cooperation among states entirely. While it acknowledges the constraints imposed by the anarchic structure of the international system, structural realism recognizes that states may engage in cooperative game when it serves their interests or enhances their security. Nevertheless, such cooperation is often limited and contingent upon a balance of power considerations.

In other words, structural realism presents a scenario in which the democratization and consolidation of peace and security emerge as central themes shaping inter-regional cooperation between North and South in the Black Sea region's post-war era. This scenario envisions a paradigm shift towards a more democratic and stable political order, characterized

[19] Lucian-Dumitru Dirdală, "Neorealismul" (Neorealism) in Andrei Miroiu and Radu-Sebastian Ungureanu (eds.), *Manual de Relații Internaționale* (International Relations Handbook), Iași: Polirom, 2006, pp. 127–38.
[20] Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*.
[21] *Idem*, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security* vol. 18, no. 2/1993, pp. 44–79, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539097.

by the promotion of liberal values, respect for human rights, and adherence to the rule of law. Through concerted efforts to consolidate peace and security, stakeholders in the Black Sea region can foster greater cooperation and integration, transcending traditional geopolitical divides. At its core, structural realism emphasizes the importance of structural factors, such as power dynamics and systemic constraints, in shaping state behaviour and interactions. In the context of the Black Sea region, structural realism suggests that the democratization and consolidation of peace and security are essential for promoting stability, reducing conflict, and advancing shared interests among North and South.

Moreover, the consolidation of peace and security in the Black Sea region is intrinsically linked to broader processes of regional integration and cooperation. Structural realism highlights the interconnectedness of security, economic development, and political stability, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and holistic approaches to addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity. Through cross-border cooperation, joint initiatives, and confidence-building measures, North and South can overcome cultural and economic divisions and build trust, laying the foundations for sustainable peace and prosperity.

As we mentioned above, in Kenneth Waltz's structural realist framework, cooperative relations among states are viewed through the lens of power dynamics and systemic constraints within the international system. Waltz acknowledges that states may engage in cooperative behaviour, but he emphasizes that such cooperation is often driven by considerations of power and security rather than altruism or shared values. From a structural realist perspective, cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region and Black Sea Region can be understood in terms of strategic calculations and the pursuit of relative gains.

Cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region and Black Sea Region can be defined within the framework of structural realism by examining the economic and human capital resources that each region brings to the table. From an economic perspective, the Baltic Sea Region is characterized by advanced economies, strong trade networks, and high levels of human capital. These economic resources provide the Baltic Sea Region with a significant advantage in terms of economic power and influence, shaping its interactions with other regions, including the Black Sea Region.

Economic structure of the Baltic region[22]

Country	Economic Complexity Trade	Economic Complexity Research	GDP/capita
Denmark	1.02 (27/131)	1.63 (15/140)	68.007 USD
Sweden	1.54 (8/131)	1.92 (7/140)	61.143 USD
Finland	1.42 (13/131)	1.56 (17/140)	53.554 USD
Estonia	-0.19 (54/131)	0.022 (61/140)	27.961 USD
Latvia	-0.15 (53/131)	-0.47 (91/140)	21.096 USD
Lithuania	0.91 (30/131)	-0.21 (76/140)	23.836 USD
Poland	1.01 (28/131)	0.55 (34/140)	18.000 USD
Germany	1.81 (5/131)	1.87 (8/140)	51.204 USD

On the other hand, the Black Sea Region possesses valuable natural resources, strategic geographic location, and cultural diversity. While the region may lag the Baltic Sea Region in terms of economic development and human capital, it holds considerable potential for growth and development. From a structural realist perspective, cooperation between the two regions can be seen as a strategic calculation aimed at maximizing economic opportunities, mitigating security risks, and enhancing mutual interests. Moreover, cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region and Black Sea Region can be driven by shared security concerns and the desire to promote stability and prosperity in the wider European neighbourhood. Both regions face common security challenges, including threats from transnational crime, terrorism, and geopolitical tensions. By working together to address these challenges, states in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions can enhance their security and resilience, while also promoting regional stability and cooperation.

Thus, cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region and Black Sea Region can be understood within the framework of structural realism, which emphasizes the role of power dynamics and systemic constraints in shaping state behaviour. By examining the economic and human capital resources of each region, as well as shared security concerns and strategic calculations, we can gain insights into the potential for cooperation and the challenges that may arise in the pursuit of mutual interests. While cooperation between the two regions may face obstacles, it also holds the promise of enhancing stability, prosperity, and security in the wider European neighbourhood.

Back to the Future: Neomedievalism and Regionalization Concentric

Neomedievalism, as a theoretical framework, offers a unique perspective on international relations, particularly in the context of encouraging cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region and the Black Sea Region. Neomedievalism posits that the modern international system exhibits characteristics reminiscent of the medieval period, where authority is fragmented, power is diffuse, and governance is decentralized. In this framework, states share sovereignty with non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations, and international institutions, leading to complex networks of governance and cooperation. One of the key features of neomedievalism is the emphasis on

[22] Results obtained by combining The Observatory of Economic Complexity databases with data obtained by the author from the authorities of the analysed states (2021).

networked governance and multilevel diplomacy. Rather than relying solely on traditional state-centric approaches to diplomacy and governance, neomedievalism highlights the importance of engaging a diverse array of actors, including subnational governments, civil society organisations, and transnational networks.[23] By leveraging these multilevel channels of diplomacy and cooperation, states in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions can overcome traditional barriers to cooperation and foster more inclusive and adaptive forms of governance. Moreover, neomedievalism underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of states in the modern international system. In contrast to the Westphalian model of state sovereignty, which emphasizes the autonomy and independence of states, neomedievalism acknowledges that states are deeply interconnected through networks of trade, finance, communication, and migration. This interconnectedness creates opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between states in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions, as they seek to address common challenges and pursue shared interests in areas such as economic development, environmental protection, and security.

Furthermore, neomedievalism highlights the role of non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, international organisations, and civil society groups, in shaping global governance and cooperation. These non-state actors often possess significant resources, expertise, and influence, which can complement and enhance the efforts of states in addressing complex transnational issues. By engaging with non-state actors and harnessing their capabilities, states in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions can leverage their collective strengths and resources to achieve common goals and overcome shared challenges.

In the context of neomedievalism, economic and human resources cooperation between regions like the Baltic Sea and Black Sea can be seen as part of a broader networked governance approach, where various actors, both state and non-state, collaborate across borders to address shared challenges and pursue common interests in the post-war era.

From an economic perspective, neomedievalism encourages the formation of trans regional networks and partnerships aimed at promoting trade, investment, and economic development. By leveraging their respective comparative advantages and pooling resources, regions like the Baltic Sea and Black Sea can enhance their economic competitiveness and resilience, while also fostering greater integration and interconnectedness. This may involve initiatives such as joint infrastructure projects, cross-border trade agreements, and collaborative research and development efforts. Similarly, in terms of human resources cooperation, neomedievalism emphasizes the importance of promoting mobility, exchange, and collaboration among individuals and institutions across regions. This may include initiatives such as student exchange programmes, professional training opportunities, and academic partnerships, which facilitate the transfer of knowledge, skills, and expertise between regions. By encouraging cross-regional collaboration in education, research, and innovation, neomedievalism seeks to harness the full potential of human capital to drive economic growth and development. One example of economic and human resources cooperation in the context

[23] Bruce Holsinger, "Neomedievalism and International Relations," in Louise D'Arcens (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 165–79, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781316091708.012.

of neomedievalism is the European Union's Erasmus+ programme, which promotes student and staff mobility, academic cooperation, and innovation across European regions. Through initiatives like Erasmus+, the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions can foster greater collaboration in education, research, and innovation, while also promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding among their respective populations. Such initiatives exemplify the principles of networked governance and flexible cooperation central to neomedievalism, which prioritize inclusivity, adaptability, and collaboration across borders.

Marxist Analysis of Post-War Dynamics of Cooperation

A Marxist analysis of post-war dynamics of cooperation between the Black Sea region and Baltic Sea region offers a critical perspective on the underlying economic, social, and political forces shaping their interactions. From a Marxist lens, cooperation between regions is often viewed through the prism of class struggle, capitalist exploitation, and uneven development.[24][25] In the aftermath of war, Marxist analysis suggests that the imperatives of capitalist accumulation and geopolitical competition may exacerbate tensions and hinder genuine cooperation between the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions.

Marxist theory emphasizes the role of economic factors in shaping international relations, highlighting the importance of class dynamics and capitalist interests in driving state behaviour. In the context of post-war cooperation between the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions, Marxist analysis suggests that capitalist imperatives may undermine efforts to foster genuine solidarity and mutual cooperation. Economic disparities, unequal access to resources, and competition for markets may fuel tensions and perpetuate divisions between the two regions, rather than fostering genuine cooperation. Additionally, Marxist analysis highlights the potential for contradictions and conflicts within and between capitalist states, as competing capitalist interests vie for power and influence in the international arena. In the context of the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions, Marxist theory suggests that contradictions between capitalist states and internal class struggles within them may create opportunities for cooperation and solidarity among states based on shared class interests, rather than capitalist imperatives. However, Marxist analysis also cautions against romanticizing the prospects for cooperation between capitalist states, highlighting the structural constraints imposed by capitalism and imperialism. In the context of the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions, Marxist theory suggests that genuine cooperation and solidarity among states may only be possible through radical social and political transformation, aimed at challenging capitalist hegemony and building a more just and equitable world order based on socialist principles.

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[24] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Martin Milligan, 1. publ., Mineola, NY: Dover Publ., 2007.

[25] Robert Waterman McChesney (ed.), *Capitalism and the Information Age: The Political Economy of the Global Communication Revolution*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998.

Conclusion

Our analysis presented in this paper offers valuable insights into the dynamics of cooperation and security in the post-war era, particularly between the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions. Through the lenses of structural realism, neomedievalism, and Marxist analysis, we have examined different theoretical frameworks and perspectives that shed light on the complexities and challenges facing these regions as they navigate the aftermath of conflict and strive to build a more peaceful and prosperous future.

Firstly, structural realism highlights the importance of power dynamics and systemic constraints in shaping state behaviour, emphasizing the need for cooperation and deterrence strategies to address security challenges in the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions. Secondly, neomedievalism offers a networked governance approach that encourages flexible and adaptive forms of cooperation, leveraging the interconnectedness of states and non-state actors to address shared challenges and pursue common interests.

Furthermore, Marxist analysis underscores the role of economic, social, and political factors in shaping international relations, highlighting the contradictions and conflicts inherent in capitalist systems and the potential for class struggle to drive cooperation and solidarity among states. By examining these different perspectives, we have gained a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics driving cooperation and security in the post-war era and identified potential pathways for future engagement and collaboration between the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions.

Importantly, this analysis serves as a starting point for a robust and meaningful debate over the post-war era perspectives and the future trajectory of cooperation between these regions. By engaging with diverse theoretical frameworks and perspectives, stakeholders and policymakers can explore alternative approaches, challenge conventional wisdom, and identify innovative solutions to the complex challenges facing the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions. This debate will be crucial in shaping the policies and strategies needed to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the post-war era and beyond.

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The Reconstruction Plan For Ukraine – The Key To Prove Europe's Geopolitical Resilience?

Tana Alexandra Foarfă

Abstract. At the latest State of the Union speech delivered on September 13, 2023, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announced the birth of a geopolitical Union, considering that supporting Ukraine, standing up to Russia's aggression, responding to an assertive China and investing in partnerships are proofs that EU's geopolitical resilience is enhancing. While these political positions on key foreign affairs issues cannot highlight immediate results, it is worth exploring whether some of the actions have increased the EU's geopolitical resilience as it is described in the EU Strategic Foresight Report. This paper aims to focus on the EU support for Ukraine dimension. It will review the immediate response and short-term response provided by the EU to Ukraine, in terms of macro-financial assistance, budget support, emergency assistance, crisis response and humanitarian aid, military assistance measures. Afterwards will focus more specifically on the recently created Ukraine Facility 2024-2027. Lastly, the paper will try to answer to the question on whether the Ukraine Facility 2024-2027, aimed to help Ukraine recover, rebuild and modernise once the war is over, has influenced the perception on the EU on the international scene in terms of geopolitical position and it will complementarily reflect on the specific objectives of the Facility and their reflection on the EU's geopolitical role.

Keywords: Ukraine reconstruction, resilience, EU, Ukraine Facility 2024-2027

Introduction

At the latest State of the Union speech delivered on September 13, 2023, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announced the birth of a geopolitical Union, considering that supporting Ukraine, standing up to Russia's aggression, responding to an assertive China and investing in partnerships are proofs that EU's geopolitical resilience is enhancing. While it is clear that these political positions on key foreign affairs issues cannot highlight immediate results, it is worth exploring whether some of the actions have increased the EU's geopolitical resilience as it is described in the EU Strategic Foresight Report.

This paper aims to focus on the EU support for Ukraine dimension. It will review the immediate response and short-term response provided by the EU to Ukraine, in terms of macro-financial assistance, budget support, emergency assistance, crisis response and humanitarian aid, military assistance measures. Afterwards will focus more specifically on the recently created Ukraine Facility 2024-2027. Lastly, the paper will try to answer to the question on whether the Ukraine Facility 2024-2027, aimed to help Ukraine recover, rebuild, and modernise once the war is over, has influenced the perception on the EU on the international scene in terms of geopolitical position and it will complementarily reflect on the specific objectives of the Facility and their reflection on the EU's geopolitical role.

Prospects Following Two Years of War

If we imagine the scene of international politics as a chessboard, the Putin regime's decision to invade Ukraine has prompted a number of actors to consider next moves. Especially the European Union (EU), which wishes to maintain peace on the global stage, but it is not comfortable in taking decisions when faced with such rapid movements and with serious consequences on its own territory. In general, the European Union is known to be a meticulous, careful, calculated player, always paying attention to the rules and particularly making sure that the partner obeys the rules. The rules, principles, values represent the power of the EU and the normative voice through which it imposes itself on a global level. Ignorance of international rules by the Putin regime led the EU to impose itself by assuming a stronger symbolic presence in Ukraine. Over time, the EU has used tense moments to make symbolic decisions to strengthen its power on the global stage.

The EU's relationship with Ukraine is no exception. Through his actions, both in 2014 and 2022, Putin achieved managed to strengthen the European Union's relations with Ukraine and even advance Ukraine's pro-European course to a level that seemed unlikely just a few years ago years.

Two years ago, European citizens and leaders reacted with unprecedented solidarity towards Ukraine, fearing at the same time about the impact of the war taking place close to the EU borders. However, a recent survey conducted by European Council on Foreign Relations in January 2024 highlights that only 10% of the Europeans interviewed still believe that Ukraine can win the war, while 20% believe that Russia has the highest chances to win the war.

And the reality on the field does not look extremely bright in determining us to think that a victory for Ukraine is close to emerge. In two years, Ukraine reconquered half of the occupied territory, while Russia is still present on 18% of the country.[1]

There are, according to the UN data,[2] more than 6,5 million Ukrainian refugees displaced across Europe, and those civilians that remained in Ukraine have to face destroyed homes, infrastructure, lack of schools and hospitals.

Perhaps these numbers are the ones determining European citizens to be reluctant to a Ukrainian victory. Some might argue that other factors might also play a role and one can already notice signs of Ukraine fatigue, combined with the fact that 2024 is the ultimate electoral year. In March Russia will have presidential elections, which will most likely mean another mandate for Vladimir Putin. But elections take place both in the EU and the USA, and the prospects are not optimistic. In the US, there are concerns about a potential return of Donald Trump to the White House. And in the EU, the extremist, populist, and Eurosceptic parties are believed to be capable to destabilize the pro-European majority in the European Parliament.

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[1] Carmen Valică, Andrei Avram, "24 Februarie 2024: Doi Ani de Război. Drumul de La Slava Ukraini La Ajutoare Blocate Și Depozite de Muniție Goale. O Cronologie" (February 24, 2024: two years of war. The road from Slava Ukraini to blocked aid and empty munitions stocks), *Europa Liberă România*, March 16, 2024, https://romania.europalibera.org/a/doi-ani-de-razboi-rusia-ucraina/32829382.html.

[2] UNHCR, "Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation," n.d., https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine.

Ukraine Recovery Plan

Although facing full war on its territory, Ukraine was already reflecting in 2022 upon a recovery plan. On July 4-5, the International Ukraine Recovery Conference took place in Lugano.

Initially, the conference in Lugano had been planned as the 5th Ukraine Reform Conference, an annual high-level political event that allowed Ukraine to highlight its reforms progress and discuss the next reform priorities. Against the backdrop of the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine, Ukraine and Switzerland have jointly decided to proceed with the organisation of the conference, but to refocus the priorities on a topic that is more relevant to Ukraine in the current situation. The conference in Lugano was therefore renamed the Ukraine Recovery Conference and concentrated on recovery.

High-level representatives across the EU, as well as academics and security experts were invited to debate the methods, priorities, and principles of recovery, social, economic, environmental and infrastructure recovery from damages and losses caused by the war, as well as reforms that are possible or necessary to implement in the current situation. All these discussions were initiated following the presentation of the Ukraine Recovery Plan, at which international partners were invited to contribute.

The Recovery Plan is based on five guiding principles:

1. Start now and ramp up gradually.
2. Grow prosperity in equitable way.
3. Integration in EU.
4. Build back better at national and regional scales.
5. Enable private investments.

Following these principles, there are 17 fields of investments, each of them indicating the financial amount needed for the reforms and investments proposed:

- Recovery pre-requisites: Strengthening institutional capacity.
- Recovery pre-requisites: Digital government.
- Strengthen defence and security.
- Strive for EU integration.
- Re-build clean and safe environment.
- Energy independence and Green Deal.
- Boost business environment.
- Ensure competitive access to funding.
- Secure macro-financial stability.
- Grow value adding sectors of economy.
- Logistics de-bottleneck and integration with EU.
- Recovery and upgrade of housing and regions infrastructure.
- Recovery and modernization of social infrastructure.
- Improve Education system.
- Upgrade HealthCare system.
- Develop Culture and Sport systems.

- Secure targeted and effective social policy.

An updated joint Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA3) released in February 2024 by the Government of Ukraine, the World Bank Group, the European Commission, and the United Nations estimates that the total cost of reconstruction and recovery in Ukraine is €452.8 billion, needed for the next decade.

EU'S Role In the Reconstruction Of Ukraine

The European Union has assumed a visible role in supporting Ukraine from the beginning of the conflict, justified by both the fact that a war at the eastern border is a security threat that the EU needs to control and tackle and by the fact that fast reaction and visibility would consolidate its role on the international scene. This ambition goes in line with the narrative presented following the first major challenge the 2019-2024 European Commission faced, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategic orientation of the European Commission focused on recovery following the pandemic and on the concept of resilience, which should in principle represent the core of all policy priorities for the 2019-2024 period. The 2020 Strategic Foresight Report presents four types of resilience, the one relevant for our research being the **geopolitical resilience**, which "relates to Europe bolstering its 'open strategic autonomy' and global leadership role".[3]

Since the pandemic was the major reference for the challenge faced at the moment of the report, the geopolitical dimension is rather limited in its understanding to the concept of strategic autonomy, a notion explained as "the EU's commitment to open and fair trade, preserving the benefits of an open economy and supporting partners around the world to lead the renewed and reinvigorated form of multilateralism the world needs. At the same time, the EU is aware of the need to reduce its dependency and strengthen its security of supply across key technologies and value chains".[4] In essence, the geopolitical dimension is restricted to the needs and challenges seen at the moment of the pandemic, understood through an economic, trade and industrial perspective. Following this notion, the report explores the capacity features to face future shocks, the potential vulnerabilities that can worsen the negative impact of the challenges on the geopolitical dimension and, last but not least, the opportunities that can increase the geopolitical resilience. For an overall picture they have been summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Summary of the geopolitical resilience capacities, vulnerabilities, and opportunities

Geopolitical resilience	**Capacities**	**Vulnerabilities**	**Opportunities**
	EU is considered a trusted partner and responsible leader	Multilateralism and the global financial system are under	The shift towards an increasingly multipolar world offers a new opportunity for

[3] European Commission, "2020 Strategic Foresight Report," n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-planning/strategic-foresight/2020-strategic-foresight-report_en, 14.
[4] European Commission, "Europe's Moment: Repair and Prepare for the next Generation," May 27, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940, 12

Geopolitical resilience	Capacities	Vulnerabilities	Opportunities
		increasing pressure from narrow national interests	Europe to reinforce its role in the global order and lead the revival of multilateral governance structures
	Europe's extensive global trade capacity underpins its geopolitical power and resilience	Growing economic and political weight of emerging players, supported by them demographic weight, as the EU's share in the world population and in global GDP diminishes	Strong cooperation with like-minded democracies is increasingly important
	EU is a space power	Increasing use of hybrid threats, space and cyber warfare, disinformation, and the growing role of non-state actors	Boosting Europe's open strategic autonomy is an imperative
	EU builds resilience in its neighbourhood and beyond	Managing migration in an orderly way	A reliable supply of food also needs to be ensured across the EU
	EU has a long-standing capacity and legacy in shaping international standards and norms	A lack of EU member states unity in specific foreign and security policy areas is a source of fragility	Being more strategic about raw materials is fundamental
	EU is in a strong position to shape the multilateral system of global economic governance, develop mutually beneficial relations to boost its competitiveness, and to advance and set global standards for the green and digital transitions	The COVID-19 crisis has revealed Europe's overreliance on non-EU suppliers for critical raw materials, and has highlighted how supply disruptions can affect industrial ecosystems and other productive sectors	A stable rules-based trading system and a level playing field are key objectives for the EU

Geopolitical resilience	Capacities	Vulnerabilities	Opportunities
		Trade and investment have plunged, undermining global prosperity and stability	Industrial alliances can be at the forefront of this change, bringing together investors, public institutions and industrial partners to help industry develop strategic technologies
		Europe's economic sovereignty is at stake. Other global powers are combining geopolitical and economic interests to increase their influence in the world. This includes protectionism, export control and the international role of currencies	
		The crisis accelerated attacks from authoritarian regimes against democratic systems via misleading narratives.	

A couple of considerations need to be further explored. One can understand that the geopolitical resilience of the Union is tightly link to a strong trade capacity and to an open strategic autonomy, both being achieved through ensuring security and consolidation to EU key value chains. Second, across time the EU has portrayed itself on the international stage as the main normative power that promotes multilateralism, cooperation, and democratic values. The report reiterates this aspect and links it to the possibility for the EU to set global standards for the green and digital transitions Third, the main threats that seem to be at the short-term horizon were the economic expansion of the global powers and of emerging players, with a rather long-term prospect on the hybrid threats and disinformation and propaganda attacks against the EU democratic system.

In 2021, the Strategic Foresight Report continues the same narrative regarding the geopolitical resilience, although not specifically mentioned. The concept of open strategic

autonomy evolves from a clear necessity towards a long-term vision towards 2050, from a concept towards ten areas of action that link the domestic and external policy agenda.[5]

Table 2: areas of action of the geopolitical resilience

Number	Area of action
1	Ensuring sustainable and resilient health and food systems
2	Securing decarbonized and affordable energy
3	Strengthening capacity in data management, artificial intelligence, and cutting-edge technologies
4	Securing and diversifying supply of critical raw materials
5	Ensuring first-mover global position in standard-setting
6	Building resilient and future-proof economic and financial systems
7	Developing and retaining skills and talents matching EU ambitions
8	Strengthening security and defence capacities and access to space
9	Working with global partners to promote peace, security, and prosperity for all
10	Strengthening the resilience of institutions

The fact that the 2021 strategic report makes a clear reference to Russia's foreign policy that creates instability in the region, threatens and challenges the EU democratic system that represents the core of its member states brings the geopolitical concept closer to the security challenges at the Eastern borders: "With Russia, the EU needs to continue its principled approach of defending its interests and promoting values based on the implementation of the five agreed principles[6]. The EU must insist that the Russian leadership demonstrate a more constructive engagement and stop actions against the EU and its Member States and partner third countries."[7]

Only one year later, on February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. In 2023, with the occasion of the annual State of the Union speech in the European Parliament, President Ursula von der Leyen announced "the birth of a geopolitical Union – supporting Ukraine, standing up to Russia's aggression, responding to an assertive China and investing in partnerships."[8]

[5] European Commission, "2021 Strategic Foresight Report," n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-planning/strategic-foresight/2021-strategic-foresight-report_en, 21.

[6] On March 14, 2016, EU High Representative Federica Mogherini together with the EU foreign minister agreed on the five guiding principles of the EU's policy towards Russia, which continue to be the foundation of EU-Russia relations: (1) insisting on full implementation of the Minsk agreements before economic sanctions against Russia are lifted; (2) pursuing closer relations with the former Soviet republics in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood (including Ukraine) and central Asia; (3) becoming more resilient to Russian threats such as energy security, hybrid threats, and disinformation; (4) despite tensions, engaging selectively with Russia on a range of foreign-policy issues, among them cooperation on the Middle East, counter-terrorism and climate change; (5) increasing support for Russian civil society and promoting people-to-people contacts, given that sanctions target the regime rather than Russian people.

[7] European Commission, "2021 Strategic Foresight Report", p.18.

[8] European Commission, "2023 State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen," September 13, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_4426.

Financial Efforts, Military Assistance and the Ukraine Facility

Since the start of Russia's war of aggression, the EU and its Member States and the European financial institutions, in a Team Europe approach, offered over €65.6 billion in financial, humanitarian, emergency, budget and military support as follows:

- €40.5 billion to support its overall economic, social, and financial resilience. This includes a financial support package of up to €18 billion for 2023.
- over €25 billion in military assistance has also been made available under the European Peace Facility and by Member States directly

On 20 June 2023, the Commission proposed to set up a financial instrument to support Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction, and modernisation. The Ukraine Facility aims to provide coherent and predictable support to Ukraine for 2024-2027 in partnership and coordination with EU Member States, European financial institutions as Team Europe, and with other international financial institutions, the Multi-Agency Donor Coordination Platform, civil society, private sector, and local authorities.

In February 2024 negotiators from the European Parliament and the Council of the EU reached a provisional agreement to grant €50 billion for the Ukraine Facility to aid Ukraine's recovery and modernisation efforts from 2024 to 2027. This agreement was adopted in the European Parliament plenary session on February 27, 2024.

Apart from the €50 billion, the Ukraine Facility establishes several key elements:

The establishment of the "Ukraine Facility Dialogue" between the European Parliament, European Commission and the Verkhovna Rada guarantees regular discussions every four months on the progress and implementation of the Facility, fostering transparency and democratic oversight. This process also provides for the engagement of civil society and diverse Ukrainian societal actors.

Conditions for the budget allocation and financial support. An amount of 33% of the resources are designated as grants, with at least 20% dedicated to the recovery, reconstruction, and modernisation of Ukraine's sub-national authorities such as regions, cities, and local communities. Furthermore, 20% of the Facility's investments will be earmarked for green initiatives, and 15% of support directed towards SMEs.

The agreement foresees the possibility of including further revenue in the future, with a specific mention that Russia must be "held fully accountable and pay for the massive damage caused by its war of aggression against Ukraine" and hence compensate for the financially assessable damage caused.

The creation of a web portal for Ukraine's financial operations and the mandatory publication of data on funding recipients exceeding EUR 100 000.

Political Support – EU Candidate Status

It is without doubt that the financial support and military equipment provided to Ukraine represent the most critical help that Ukraine needs. Nevertheless, there is even a more powerful, symbolically speaking, support that the EU provided. Months after Putin invaded Ukraine, the EU announced in June 2022 that Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova will be

granted candidate country status.[9] This announcement was foreseen by the EU to consolidate its position in the region and to send a message about its intention to protect its neighbourhood.

One year later, the European Commission adopts the 2023 Enlargement package, in which it recommends to open negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, to grant candidate status to Georgia and to open accession negotiations with BiH, once the necessary degree of compliance is achieved: "Despite Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 and its brutal war of aggression, Ukraine has continued to progress on democratic and rule of law reforms. The granting of candidate status for EU accession to Ukraine in June 2022 has further accelerated reform efforts".[10]

According to the article 49 of the Treaty of the European Union, "Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members. The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account. The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements." [11]

Summarising the process, the first step was taken by Ukraine, followed by the Republic of Moldova, which submitted this request, received a favourable opinion from the Commission in an accelerated procedure and received the approval of the Council and the European Parliament, thus becoming a candidate country. In other words, the EU considers that Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova are on the right track in complying with European standards and rules and are supported by European institutions and member states in this regard.

Nevertheless, becoming an EU member is a complex procedure that does not happen overnight. In the case of Romania for instance, the application for accession was submitted in 1995, in 1997 the Commission issued a favourable opinion on our application, and in 2000 the negotiation process was launched, completed in December 2004, with the date of accession January 1, 2007.

At this moment, the Commission considers that both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova have the capacity to fulfil the accession requirements, also known as the *Copenhagen criteria*. These include:

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[9] European Council, "European Council Conclusions on Ukraine, the Membership Applications of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, Western Balkans and External Relations, 23 June 2022," June 23, 2022, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/23/european-council-conclusions-on-ukraine-the-membership-applications-of-ukraine-the-republic-of-moldova-and-georgia-western-balkans-and-external-relations-23-june-2022/.

[10] European Commission, "Commission Adopts 2023 Enlargement Package, Recommends to Open Negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, to Grant Candidate Status to Georgia and to Open Accession Negotiations with BiH, Once the Necessary Degree of Compliance Is Achieved," November 8, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_5633.

[11] European Union Official Journal, Treaty of the European Union.

- the stability of the institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, as well as the respect and protection of minorities.
- a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressures and market forces in the EU.
- the ability to assume the obligations of membership, including the ability to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that constitute the body of EU legislation (the *acquis*), as well as accession to the objectives of the political, economic, and monetary union.

All these criteria are translated into practice through a series of European regulations and directives that each candidate country must adopt as national legislation, through reforms, but also investments. The European Commission provides funds for this implementation through the Instrument of Pre-Accession so that the candidate countries can invest in the necessary transformations, as well as technical assistance in order to carry out the reforms.

In order to understand the complexity of the negotiations, one could explore the European Commission 2004 final report regarding the progress made by Romania in order to join the EU.[12] The analysis of the progress was structured into three main parts:

1. The political criteria, for instance how democracy and the rule of law are presented in Romania and how Romania respects human rights and the protection of minorities. Here, problems were recorded with the excessive use of Emergency Ordinances, the non-implementation of laws on access to information and the transparency of the legislative process, widespread corruption at all levels of society, the lack of allocation of resources in the public administration of the territory, discrimination of the Roma minority.

2. The economic criteria, the Commission evaluating the economic evolution of Romania during the period 1997 - 2004, the macroeconomic stability, where there were issued recommendations on the need to continue the disinflationary process and to reduce the public sector deficit, fiscal sustainability and the need for reforms, where the Commission recommended reforms in the functioning of the judicial and public administration systems, including a uniform and predictable of the European law implementation in order to stimulate the business environment.

3. The ability to face the obligations of EU membership, which consists in the evaluation of each chapter of the acquis communautaire: free movement of goods, people, services, capital, business law, competition policy, agriculture, fishing, transport, taxation, Economic and Monetary Union, social policies and employment, energy, industrial policy, SMEs, science and technology, education and youth, telecommunications, culture, regional policy, environmental protection, consumer health, judicial cooperation, Customs Union, international economic relations, common foreign and security policy, financial control, budgetary provisions.

[12] Nicholson Winterbourne, "Report on Romania's Progress towards Accession - Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy | A5-0103/2004 | European Parliament," European Union, 2004 - Source: European Parliament, n.d., https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-5-2004-0103_EN.html.

Consequently, in order to achieve all these reforms, a whole plan of reforms and investments is needed. In 1995, Romania presented, together with accession application, a National Strategy for the Preparation of EU Accession, which mentioned most of the elements necessary to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria. And in 1999, two years after the favourable opinion of the European Commission regarding the application for accession, Romania adopted the National Programme for Accession to the European Union, with the clear objectives of meeting the accession criteria.

In the case of Ukraine, a country in the midst of war, the question of a simple accession strategy cannot be raised. First of all, the reconstruction of the country is needed in order for it to be functional. And second, only after the end of the war it will be possible to discuss deep structural changes and reforms. Consequently, the reconstruction plan for Ukraine can be understood as a manifesto of how the country will implement the reforms necessary to start pre-accession negotiations, as well as the investments that will bring it up to speed with the rest of the states in the region.

The reconstruction plan focuses on people, economy and infrastructure and has three development phases:

- The first concerns solving urgent problems essential for the survival of Ukrainians, such as water supply. This phase is focusing on critical elements, on reparation.
- The second is the rapid reconstruction stage, which will be launched as soon as the war ends. It will focus on short-term measures such as temporary housing for Ukrainians, projects to rebuild basic infrastructure in health and education (hospitals and schools). In addition, the authorities have launched online platforms where citizens can document the damage they sustain as a result of military operations (residential buildings, economic infrastructure, civil social infrastructure).
- The third stage is that of increasing resilience, transforming, and developing the country in the long term, through reforms and investments.

Each of these three stages, but especially the last one, is the one that will set the tone for the EU accession prospects.

With these reflections in mind, it is safe to conclude that the prospects of the EU involvement in supporting Ukraine during the war but also in its reconstruction plan will have an influence on the level of geopolitical resilience of the Union. For the EU, launching the accession process with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine is a step that re-opened the debate on the EU enlargement policy. This topic, in full election year, will be influenced by the elections results in June 2024. While the countries that held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU so far had a role to play in keeping the enlargement process high on the agenda, June 2024 will see Hungary holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU, a country which is known for Orban's controversial positions and numerous vetoes on key strategic issues. This aspect, corroborated with the concerns for the results of the European elections which indicate that the extremist political parties might secure more seats in the European Parliament and might even contribute to the growth of the conservative political groups in the European Parliament is of high concern, as conservative positions on EU policies would also involve a lack of advancement in the EU enlargement policy.

Conclusion

Following Ukraine's invasion by Russia, the European Union's dependence on Russian oil and fossil fuel was exposed. The European Union issued numerous sanctions against Russian oligarchs, banks, companies and after two years of war, it issues a thirteenth package of restrictive measures against Putin's regime. The new sanctioned listings target the military and defence sectors, members of the judiciary, local politicians, and people responsible for the illegal deportation and military re-education of Ukrainian children. Furthermore, new entities were added to the list of those directly supporting Russia's military and industrial complex in its war of aggression against Ukraine, including entities located in third countries and involved in the circumvention of trade restrictions. The EU introduced further restrictions on unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) and on exports of goods which contribute, in particular, to the enhancement of Russian industrial capabilities.

Sanctions were effective in slowing down Russia's ability to finance and use technology for the war and managed to decrease the share of Russia's pipeline gas in EU from over 40% in 2021 to about 8% in 2023. Nevertheless, the sanctions alone were not sufficient to determine Russia to retrieve its troops and consequently the EU reinforced its position as a leading actor in the region by granting candidate country status to Ukraine and Republic of Moldova. By bringing the enlargement policy back on the table and inviting Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in, the European Union made a significant step towards its quest ot consolidate its geopolitical resilience.

One step however is not enough, as preparing Ukraine to become an EU member state does not only mean the end of the war, but also the need for its large-scale reconstruction. Therefore, the EU must prove its commitment towards supporting Ukraine in this process and consolidating its key role in the reconstruction. As a political statement is not enough, the EU launched the Ukraine Facility in an effort to prove that political support also comes with financial support. The amount offered is a start but not enough for the needs of the Ukrainian government. Therefore, the geopolitical resilience of the Union is tightly linked to the economic resilience of the Union and its capacity to support Ukraine on the long-term in its path towards the European Union.

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War and Culture: A Speculative Incursion into the Aftermaths of the Ukrainian War

Ileana Orlich

As a response to a theme reiterated and explained many times that Europe is just the tiniest of continents that can't do anything in the case of the Ukrainian war, and to the more spicy themes that critique in no particular order the elements of capitalism, nationalism, capitalism equated to fascism, fascism equated to communism, and American neo-imperialism, if you are an ethnic Romanian living abroad like me, you will probably wonder and would want to speculate about what will happen in Central and Eastern Europe in general, and Romania in particular, what would be some of the themes that would evolve or be developed in the post-Ukrainian war era.

Here are some imagined possibilities for journalists, cultural commentators, political wannabees, and overall literati and happenstance contributors to the conversation. Most likely, there will be the paramount condemnation of authoritarian regimes like Putin's, with resounding recent accusations from leading politicians and heads of state of having just murdered Alexei Navalny in quick succession after the killing of Yevgeni Prigozhin under the guise of a plane crash and, a few years earlier, of Boris Nemtsov shot in plain daylight within a few yards from the Kremlin Wall; the vehement condemnations would enhance a need to showcase the development of new ideas in Central and Eastern Europe/Romania, such as for instance replacing the notions of "post-communism" with the trendy rhetoric generically labelled "liberal democracies" as a revamped identity to which Romanian society at large and many of the country's leaders, not necessarily unanimously, aspires.

More directly, historians, political pundits, and cultural commentators may even ask who won or lost the war? Biden, the EU, President Zelensky, the heroic Ukrainian army, Russian military, and strategic incompetence, or even the curse from the Snake Island echoed in Mircea Eliade's short story of the same title long before the sinking nearby of the Moskva ship carrier? To any of these there would be, no doubt, shocking answers bringing in casualties, war crimes and post war trauma, devastation, ecocide complementing genocide with specific references such as the blowing up of the Kakhovka dam that, according to forthcoming fact-finding missions, has ruined vast tracts of Ukraine land. And of course, the idea that back here, at home on the Romanian Black Sea shore and especially in the Danube Delta, it was not so quiet after all. With my American students, while on a summer study programme that included a cruise along the Sulina arm of the Delta in mid- August 2023, we watched in the immediate range of vision the black clouds of smoke exhuming, we were told, from the explosions caused by Russian drones over the chemical plants in Ismail.

Many stories will be peppered with senior defence officials and European leaders on all sides misbehaving badly and occasionally dangerously during the Ukrainian war. Among the most likely ones are the shock resulting from the very belated news that US Defence Minister Lloyd Austin underwent surgery for prostate cancer without letting anyone know about his absence at the helm, including US President Joe Biden, who was vacationing with

his family. Or the story of Ukraine's Defence Minister dismissed for embezzling millions of dollars sent for military aid as counterpart of sorts to the news' worthy proclamations of the currently decreasing personal wealth of President Zelensky. Even more recently, the case of the ex-CIA agent who lied about Hunter Biden and his American President father's ill-acquired millions in Ukraine.

Making headlines, the various histrionics of Viktor Orban culminating in his recent opposition to Ukrainian membership in the EU or the equally egregious recent claims of Hungarian nationalists that a defeated Ukraine would have to cede the Transcarpathia region to Hungary would ruffle never completely buried nationalistic feathers recently even more perturbed by Tucker Carlson's infelicitous mentioning of Transylvania during the scandalous interview with Putin. Undoubtedly, the rather naïve political balancing act of the suave Emanuel Macron wanting to play the peace maker and negotiator-in-chief role with a French savoir faire easily mocked by the Kremlin thugs would be an endless reservoir of juicy and contradictory debate. Not to be outdone, the strident nationalism of homegrown dubious characters carrying in the pockets of outsize outfits open invitations to the Russian Embassy soirees in Bucharest will also occupy centre stage in a region East of the West like the territory of Romania that still negotiates a serious consideration of its demonstrated qualifications that warranty an overdue acknowledgement of fully- fledged membership in the coveted Schengen space.

Most conversations, in foreseeable fashion, will point to the all too real threat of residual warfare of minefields and mines at the Black Sea and to the moral necessity of a sober mood not only about the past but mainly about the future: the daunting challenge for Romania to perform an engaging role as a friendly neighbouring country engaged in Ukraine's future, its reduced workforce, housing shortages, and destroyed rural and urban areas to which hundreds of Ukrainians might not return because they would continue to call Romania, among other countries in the region, their home away from home.

Won or lost, the Ukrainian war in its aftermath means a neighbouring country exhausted, ravaged, and lost in a post-communist and post-war limbo as a result of Putin's criminal objective: if he can't appropriate Ukraine and bring it back behind a new Iron Curtain into the fold of his Russian gangster-style empire, ossified social structure, and politically contaminated and ideologically infiltrated Orthodoxy, he will simply wipe out from the face of the earth the once proud and powerful Kijevan Rus – a space that historically refused to be brought into territorial and administrative submission under the sceptre of the rulers residing behind the Kremlin walls guarded nowadays by the nearby transplanted statue of Vladimir the Great, the Kijevan Prince whose own conversion alongside that of his people to Christianity had occurred about 500 years ahead of the earliest mentioning of the Moskva settlement.

And here is where multilateral cooperation with Ukraine must begin for Romania as a key geostrategic hub for the Black Sea. Its demonstrated support for Ukraine in the military, naval, and defence spheres must extend to aiding the war-ravaged Ukraine on its path to secure a successful, multi-faceted reconstruction. Because reconstruction does not mean only NATO membership for Ukraine and a military strategic balance in the Black Sea-Azov region; equally critical is the country's economic and cultural survival and continuity. Only a few months

before the war started, I travelled to the Danube Delta and was transported to the Leta Island in a war-time vehicle, a dilapidated truck, driven by Maxim, the local school music teacher. He had just returned from a trip with the school choir which he directed from a music festival in Odessa. There, he said to me as the truck was going over hurdles and leaving a thick trail of dust behind, I am Maxim with Ks not an x; luckily, he went on to say, my last name is Ivan, and that does not require any further tweaking. And the language, I asked hesitantly because I wanted to keep the conversation to a bare minimum in the immediate post-COVID pandemic and Maxim's refusal to wear a face mask. That's no problem, he replied, I teach my students in both Ukrainian and Romanian within the narrowly circumscribed space of the same classroom where they work in groups.

If the EU and the US military and economic assistance to Ukraine is and will always be indispensable, Romania's cultural assistance to Ukraine will also have to be massive to make a transformative impact on the country's goal of "joining Europe." Together, Romania and Ukraine might become a packaged team that would frame a shared agenda of developing reform and national reconstruction by eradicating corruption, strengthening the rule of law, and improving governance—a magic trifecta of transformation not just for the Central and Eastern European region, but also for an embattled continent that is facing massive migration and the ugly spectre of street violence in its once culturally secure capitals and around its culturally emblematic sites. (I am thinking here of the recent protests in front of the Buckingham Palace and of the habitual burning of cars and street riots in Lyon and Paris.)

To conclude, Romania is called to respond to a "cultural invitation" to be a good neighbour, on hand to rebuild a battered and exhausted country that has nevertheless used all its human resources to fight and diminish the geostrategic and geopolitical threat unleashed from Putin's Russia without provocation. With history watching, Romania seems favourably poised to play its already significant part in making the right move to bring Ukraine into the Central and Eastern European cultural fold.

American Strategic Cultures and Foreign Policy Uncertainty Toward Ukraine

Luke M. Perez

Abstract. American support for Europe, broadly, and Ukraine more narrowly reached a crossroads in recent months. Whatever decision and course of action taken by the White House and Congress will impact not only the strategic posture of the United States but also the security landscape of Europe for years. At issue is the US support for Ukraine's territorial integrity in its defence against the Russian invasion which began in February of 2022. The global response was nearly unanimous, with world governments promising a ceaseless sanctions regime on Russia and unwavering support for Ukraine in terms of military and economic aid. Yet in recent weeks that support has come to a standstill in the United States. My central claim in this paper is that although there is broad support for Ukraine in the United States it is fragile. Should electoral winds shift or remain stagnant, it could harm US aid in one of two ways. The first—less likely, but less dangerous—is that the US will cease to continue funding and providing weapons. The second—more likely, and more dangerous—is that US support remains tepid, stuck halfway between the ardent defenders and isolationists but producing a long-term strategy that never provides Ukraine the level of support it needs to actually win and ensure the long-term security for Europe.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine war, aid, sanctions, US support

Introduction

American support for Europe, broadly, and Ukraine more narrowly reached a crossroads in recent months. Whatever decision and course of action taken by the White House and Congress will impact not only the strategic posture of the United States but also the security landscape of Europe for years. At issue is the US support for Ukraine's territorial integrityin its defence against the Russian invasion which began in February of 2022. The global response was nearly unanimous, with world governments promising a ceaseless sanctions regime on Russia and unwavering support for Ukraine in terms of military and economic aid. Yet in recent weeks that support has come to a standstill in the United States.

However surprising for some, the friction is unsurprising for those sensitive to the cultures and traditions in American strategic thought. Even in the midst of what common sense suggests should be univocal assent, Americans debate the prudence of its foreign policy. Consider, for instance, that in the spring of 1942, American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote of the American unity following the attack on Pearl Harbour just a few months prior: "It is quite obvious that the superficial unity, achieved by the Pearl Harbour attack, is pretty well dissipated now. The isolationists are beginning to come out of their

storm cellars. We can expect a fairly strong propaganda in favour of a negotiated peace should we continue to suffer further military reverses."[1]

It was this passage that I recalled elsewhere to caution readers against high levels of global support for the Ukrainian cause.[2] For if Americans could not even remain united in the wakeof Pearl Harbour (or 9/11 for that matter), what makes us think we should remain united for a third-party half a world away. To be sure, I and, at least thus far, a majority of Americans remain emphatically convinced that Ukraine's war not only meets the standards of a justwar, but also it is in the US strategic interest to ensure their victory.

But that view is not shared by the entire electorate. A sizable minority, some within government and responsibilities for crafting and funding American national security policy, nowwant to turn off foreign aid for Ukraine. Among those who do, some argue it is a prudential judgement so that the United States can focus on great power competition with China. Others emphatically want no business in world affairs. As both groups continue to rise in stature and influence, the likelihood of a major strategic adjustment in US foreign rises.[3]

My central claim in this paper is that although there is broad support for Ukraine in the United States it is fragile. Should electoral winds shift or remain stagnant, it could harm US aid in one of two ways. The first—less likely, but less dangerous—is that the US will cease to continue funding and providing weapons. The second—more likely, and more dangerous—is that US support remains tepid, stuck halfway between the ardent defenders and isolationists but producing a long-term strategy that never provides Ukraine the level of support itneeds to actually win and ensure the long-term security for Europe. The second options remain more dangerous because the uncertainty undermines the global efforts to present a united front. Uncertainty is always, or nearly always, more dangerous because it gives the advantage to the adversary who more boldly presses on. Right now, in the current strategic environment, that is decidedly Russia.

My related claim is that this uncertainty is a product of two things, ideological stalemate within the US foreign policy community, and electoral stalemate in the US Congress. Until both the stalemate is broken, and the realignment completes, the US will continue to presenta great deal of uncertainty about its intentions for the world. The foreign policy stalemate exists between internationalists and isolationists, viz., between those who believe the US must engage with the world, and those who believe a restrained, insular posture is better for both the United States and the world.

Let me take them up in turn. This essay will not bring clarity to uncertainty. But by drawing out the sources and dynamics of the uncertainty, I hope to provide readers with a stronger,more coherent grasp of that uncertainty.

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[1] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992, p. 180.

[2] Luke M. Perez, "Considering Options in Ukraine," *Providence*, March 6, 2022, https://providencemag.com/2022/03/considering-options-in-ukraine/.

[3] For more on the patterns of strategic adjustment in the US, see Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Debating American Strategic Culture

Americans have no single tradition of doing foreign policy but rather several from whichits foreign policy leaders have drawn over its nearly two and half centuries as an independent nation. Hans J. Morgenthau argued that America has, largely, two traditions, one realist modelled after the Federalists of the early Republic, and another liberal modelled after Woodrow Wilson.[4] Writing nearly fifty years later, Walter Russel Mead reclassified American traditions into four.[5] This paper takes Mead's categories as its starting point because his four groups capture a subtle nuance implied in Morgenthau's two category schema but not fully fleshed out.

Mead named the four traditions after prominent statesmen that exemplify the general tendencies of American statecraft. They are:

1. Hamiltonian: Promote American enterprise at home and abroad.
2. Jeffersonian: Preserve American democracy from the evils of the world.
3. Wilsonian: America has a moral—and practical—duty to spread American values.
4. Jacksonian: Hold fast to the populist strain of honour, independence, and courage.

At any given time in US history, no one tradition remains preeminent. Rather, American foreign policy reflects the ideological coalition of two or more who happen to be most influential. Since the end of the Second World War, Hamiltonians and Wilsonians have aligned with eachother to promote American commerce, human rights, and rules-based order. The strength of that coalition aided American strategists who developed a winning strategic posture—albeit not without failures and missteps—during the Cold War. Both Hamiltonians and Wilsonians hold strategic priors that leaning into world affairs actively benefits the US. Their disagreements over international institutions, commerce, and other finer points of US policy shaped US activity for such an extended period of time that many within the United States and around the world took the contours of those debates as the complete constellation of America's possible foreign policy activity.

And yet, every president since the end of the Cold War has campaigned on doing *less*, not more in the world. Two examples suffice to delineate the phenomenon. Barack Obama's senior advisor described their approach in Libya as "leading from behind" which many began to suggest characterized the administration's approach to foreign affairs writ large.[6] And Donald Trump was no less enthused to reduce the American global footprint, bragging in 2022 that he told European leaders that the US will come to their

[4] Hans J. Morgenthau, "What Is the National Interest of the United States," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1952.

[5] Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 87–99.

[6] Ryan Lizza, "Barack Obama's Foreign Policy," *The New Yorker*, April 25, 2011, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/02/the-consequentialist.

defence, echoing his sentiment as recently as October 2023.[7] These examples suggest that Jeffersonians who wantless global engagement in order to "national build at home".[8] Jacksonians want less in the world because it detracts from "American greatness," and makes the US look to be weakly dependent on what other countries want. But what binds these two together is that forthree decades they have chipped away at the strategic presumption toward internationalism in American thought.

The model, however, should not be taken as the sole way to think through the history of American diplomacy, which often is less about intellectual ideas than it is about achieving practical results.[9] Regional interests, too, have equally influenced US attitudes toward international politics. George Washington explicitly called out geography as a cause for concern in foreign policy in his "Farewell Address" (1796). Time and again disagreements between New England, the South, and Western states produced three competing economic blocs, with major junctures in US strategy often occurring because two of the three aligned against the third.[10] Together with the four schools that Mead posits, the examples here demonstrate that Americans are ambitious and have a national style their own, partly evangelical, partly pragmatic. Every effort to make sense of the American way of foreign policy has classified what we do along different lines. Thus, taken as a whole, a coherent image can be drawn, with common patterns across US politicians who seemingly are at cross-purposes. For instance, no one would equate the Obama and Trump administrations with each other, yet both were sceptical of US internationalism. American Republicans are extremely skep- tical of the Iranian nuclear deal because they tend, on average, to be Hamiltonians and Jacksonians, who remain sceptical of the US ability to change the internal makeup of other countries. American Democrats tend to collect strong populists. Hillary Clinton famously walked back her support of the Trans-Pacific Partnership because of a populist insurgency from Bernie Sanders whose critical attitude of US foreign policy might be best described asa progressive-Jacksonian defence of American unions and the working class.

I should caution against trying to map an intellectual tradition onto a specific political or public intellectual. The various cultures within the United States do nevertheless give rise to different approaches, different priors that diplomats, policymakers, and military strategists believe will work. Strategy in practical terms is a theory of victory.[11] But strategy develops within a country's national style, and from that

[7] Jason Lemon, "Trump Brags He Threatened to Not Defend NATO Allies from Russia," *Newsweek*, April 22, 2022, https://www.newsweek.com/trump-brags-he-threatened-not-defend-nato-allies-russia-1700093; Otten Tori, "This Promise Is Exactly Why Russia's Putin Loves Trump so Much," *The New Republic*, October 30, 2023, https://newrepublic.com/post/176489/trump-promise-russia-defence-putin-nato.

[8] VOA, "Obama: Focus on Nation Building at Home," Voice of America, May 5, 2012, https://www.voanews.com/a/obama-focus-on-nation-building-at-home-150279945/370481.html.

[9] Robert B. Zoellick, *America in the World: A History of US Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, New York, NY: Twelve, 2020, p. 8.

[10] Peter Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest: Conflict and Change in American Foreign Policy*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

[11] Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014.

country's cultural milieu.[12]

Moreover, the various intellectual traditions exist within and between the political parties. By focusing our attention on the foreign policy traditions in the context of the political realignment, the strategic uncertainty begins to make sense—at least insofar as proving us the tools for grappling with it as a phenomenon. This framework—parties, realignment, and traditions—help both Americans and our allies to manage and anticipate change within the larger context of strategic and electoral uncertainty.

Public Opinion, Negative Partisans and Electoral Re-alignment

The previous section suggested that the tension between America's competing strategic cultures takes places within the context of electoral stalemate and political realignment. In this section, I unpack that context, showing how the realignment coincides with a pathological level of partisanship. This partisanship is endemic and deeply engrained in contemporary public discourse and threatens more than the stability of US foreign policy.

Late in 2023, Pew research reported that a majority of Americans (55% to 43%) reported that the US should pay less attention to problems overseas rather than to remain active in world affairs.[13] These reported numbers reflect the rise of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian thinking in the larger electorate. They might suggest that that support for Ukraine has softened, but at least as of this writing, they do not suggest that support is evaporating. When looking deeper at the data, the same study reported that a majority continue to see NATO positively while viewing Russia as an enemy to the US. And over the first year and half of the war, most Americans have been broadly supportive of Ukraine.[14]

Most of these differences are partisan: Republicans tend to be less supportive of Ukraine and NATO and Democrats tend to be more supportive. True, some of this is because of Donald Trump's influence over large sections of the Republican party. But some of it is because the Ukraine war started during a Democratic administration, and Republicans are the party out of power. Most partisan differences are "negative," generally opposing things they believe the other party support rather than affirming something proposed by one's co-partisans. In some yet to be published experiments that I've completed with a colleague suggest that whenvoters are presented with policy proposals by standard-bearers of the party, respondents will often become less supportive of the

[12] Colin S. Gray, "National Style in Strategy: The American Example," *International Security* vol. 6, no. 2/1981, pp. 21–47.

[13] Reem Nadeem, "Americans View NATO and Ukraine Positively, See Russia as an Enemy | Pew Research Centre," Pew Research Centre's Global Attitudes Project, July 17, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/05/10/americans-hold-positive-feelings-toward-nato-and-ukraine-see-russia-as-an-enemy/.

[14] John Gramlich, "War in Ukraine: Public Opinion in the First Year of the Conflict | Pew Research Centre," July 17, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/02/23/what-public-opinion-surveys-found-in-the-first-year-of-the-war-in-ukraine/.

proposal if the presenter was a member of the opposite political party.[15][16]

The result of these dynamics is not fully known, and much of it turns not only on the US presidential election next year, but also on congressional, senate, and even some state-level races. At the moment, isolationist leaning actors in both parties are rising in prominence. Elected Republicans have turned sharply against internationalism. Although it is too strong to claim that Nikki Haley's posture on foreign policy is the reason for her tepid performance thus far in the Republican presidential nomination primary elections, it remains a significant bellwether that she was the only adamantly pro-internationalism Republican who was considered a potential frontrunner. Democrats might not be far behind. President Joe Biden and old-guard leaders such as the late Diane Feinstein forestalled progressive Democrats from assuming leadership positions on the American left's foreign policy visions. It is nevertheless an open and debated question whether those attitudes will continue to hold in future elections.

Conclusion

Where this leave us is, unfortunately unclear, but as I suggested, with a more coherent grasp of that uncertainty. The shifting electoral dynamics and insurgent re-negotiation between foreign policy traditions suggests that US support for Ukraine could turn toward any direction. The uncertainty and ideological chaos calls to mind what Alexis de Tocqueville remarked in *Democracy in America* about democratic foreign policy. He opined that it is hard, chaotic, and devoid of strategy: "I shall have no difficulty in saying that is in the direction of external interests of society that democratic governments appear to me decidedly inferior to others.In a democracy, experience, mores, and instruction in the end almost always create the sort of everyday practical wisdom and science of small events in life that one names good sense. Good sense suffices in the ordinary course of society… but it is not always so in the relations of a people to a people."[17]

This passage is however often quoted out of context. For in the paragraph immediately preceding he qualified this point, writing that many of the most significant institutions for making foreign policy were American rather than Democratic. "It is therefore very difficult to know," he wrote, "for the present, what skill American democracy will develop in the conduct of the external affairs of state. On this point, its adversaries, like its friends, must suspend judgement."

I outlined some potentially dark and troubling insights into American strategic uncertainty, but hope that America's friends, as well as its adversaries, suspend judgment.

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[15] Luke M. Perez and Nadine S. Gibson, "Liberal International Order and the Electoral Connection: Evidence from a Survey Experiment," Unpublished Manuscript, January 1, 2024.

[16] The data suggest that most of the movement is from voters who have moderate (or medium) levels of political knowledge. Respondents with little knowledge of politics do not change their beliefs in meaningful ways, while those with high levels of knowledge develop strongly held attitudes about policy and are less persuaded by cues from elites in their respective parties.

[17] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000, I, II, 5, p. 219.

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Russia's Increasingly Aggressive Counterbalancing of the West throughout the 21st Century and the Weaponization of Narratives

Despina Georgina Popescu

Abstract. After the end of the Cold War, which brought the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia, its rightful successor, has underwent a period of rebuilding as well as redefining itself, in order to claim back its status of a great power on the international stage. Nonetheless, Russia had to redefine its foreign policy in order to counterbalance the new world hegemon. In this sense, Russia's nowadays grand strategy is rather a mixture of the Soviet legacy, which is undoubtingly still present in modern Russia's worldview, and the current international system's influence on Russia's strategy in the foreign policy, which has changed over the years in order to adapt to the new unipolar order and especially to a world where the Western norms dominate.

This paper aims to follow how Russia's strategy shifted from soft balancing at the beginning of the century towards a more asymmetrical and aggressive one that led up to the war with Georgia, the annexation of Crimea and the current war of aggression with Ukraine. In this sense, it also focuses on how the Russian leaders weaponized narratives in order to justify their aggressive behaviour and violation of the UN Charter, calling upon the western hypocrisy and unfair unipolar order in order to challenge what is considered legitimate under international law.

Keywords: international order, Russia, United Nations Organisation, war in Ukraine

Introduction

When analysing the way Russia's identity was shaped in the 21st century, it is crucial to consider its recent history as one of the two major powers of the Cold War, status that then vanished in a remarkably short period of time. To start with, at the end of the Second World War, USSR emerged as one of the two main actors of the new world order alongside the US. During the Cold War period the USSR's sphere of influence expanded to the Berlin Wall, encompassing a significant area of Europe's territories. The battle lines were set for the confrontation between the Western Bloc, as led by the US, and the Eastern Bloc, as led by USSR. The war came to an end with the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. Gorbachev had an important role to play in the declining of the Soviet Union's power, namely by means of his reforms of "perestroika" and "glasnost", which led to the USSR's states proclaiming their self-determination in the revolutionary year of 1989. The Berlin Wall fell, and later on, in 1990 Germany reunited. One by one, countries proclaimed their self-determination, 14 new separate states being established, plus the Russian Federation, which inherited the Soviet legacy.[1] The Soviet Union ceased to exist on December 26, 1991. This was the year the Russian sphere of influence retreated from central Europe to Eastern Europe.

[1] Valentin Naumescu, *Great Powers' Policy in Central and Eastern Europe. 30 Years since the End of the Cold War*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2019, p. 170.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has gone through a period of self-definition. After Gorbachev and the fall of USSR, only three presidents were in power at Kremlin, each having played an important role in how Russia has evolved as a great power over the years, and also in its sphere of influence. Boris Yeltsin, as the first president of the Russian Federation, USSR's rightful successor, was twice elected, but due to the disastrous economic consequences of USSR's collapse that left the Russian state to deal with a deep crisis and other post-communist effects, he was forced to resign, being replaced in 1999 by Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer. The confusion period that Yeltsin's rule represented for the Russian administration further weakened the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, as for example, several former-Soviet republics adhered to the EU and NATO, thus diminishing Russia's chance for ever regaining its former influence upon them. This opportunity of the post-Soviet republics came to an end once Putin came to power,[2] as starting with his leadership at the Kremlin Russia has reset itself on the path of gaining its former great power status, and that by all means, as the policy of Putin has shown over the years. Putin tightened his grip of the former countries of Soviet Union's sphere of influence, blocking any attempt of the states to integrate in Western organisations, as it has been the case of the war with Georgia or the annexation of Crimea and the war with Ukraine. Even though it would be an oversimplification to state that Russia still dreams for reconstructing the fallen Soviet Empire, it has been clear throughout the years that one of its main goals is to extend its influence over the post-Soviet countries as much as possible and to establish a buffer zone between itself and NATO and the EU, the representatives of the West.

The 21st century Russia has developed under the rule of Vladimir Putin, even though Dmitri Medvedev has in the meantime secured a mandate (2008-2012), as in this period Putin has continued to effectively rule the country in its role of prime-minister.[3] The Putin era is characterized by a cooling of relations with the West, the leader being of the opinion that the collapse of the Soviet Union "was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,"[4] and as a defender of Russia's legacy, he has been planning to bring it back on the map of great powers.

Russia's Grand Strategy

According to the "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", which was approved by Vladimir Putin in 2000, the situation of the Federation required an entire re-evaluation, from its foreign policy priorities to the necessary means to fulfil them. The concept stated that in order to strengthen the status of the Russian Federation in the international system, the main aim of the Russian foreign policy should be: "To ensure reliable security of the country, to preserve and strengthen its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to achieve firm and prestigious positions in the world community, most fully consistent with the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power, as one of the most influential centres of the modem world,

[2] *Ibidem*, pp. 173-174.
[3] *Ibidem,* p. 176.
[4] NBC News. "Putin: Soviet Collapse a 'Genuine Tragedy'," April 25, 2005, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna7632057.

and which are necessary for the growth of its political, economic, intellectual and spiritual potential."[5]

The statement mainly focuses on Russia's Great Power ambitions. Nonetheless, the new "world community" has been rather challenging for Russia, which beginning with the 1990s had to adapt its foreign policy to a world dominated by democratic norms and by the new American hegemon. Its policy over the years has been dominated by an offensive against the Occident, as represented by the US and NATO, this being mainly due to a geopolitical insecurity, as after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians faced a dramatic retreat of their influence sphere, which is now mainly dominated by "the Western enemy".

In consequence, in the last two decades, Russia's foreign policy has been shaped in such a manner as to counterbalance the West and to achieve its national core objectives at all costs. Putin's foreign policy has over the years focused on matters such as establishing a buffer zone between Russia and the West, here represented by NATO and the EU, by increasing its leverage over the neighbouring states, as also acquiring leverage in the "backyard" of the opposition through the so-called hybrid war it has led. Even though his objectives have remained mostly the same, Putin has over the years adjusted his grand strategy in order to overcome the disadvantages Russia had in comparison to the other great powers, such as the US and China. In this sense, Dr. Robert Person identified three main tendencies in Putin's grand strategy over the last twenty years, namely: the period of "pragmatic accommodation" from 2000 to 2003, then a "soft-balancing" from 2003 to 2007, and later on, beginning with the year of 2007, an "asymmetrical balancing" policy which has characterized Russia's strategy up until today.[6]

The progressive tendency from the more compromising and cooperative attitude at the beginning of the 21st century to the aggressive one nowadays can also be seen at the level of the discourse. This can be observed in the way the Russian discourse emphasized international law, security, and a multipolar world order at the beginning of the century, conveying a positive and engaged perspective on international affairs, and later on, beginning with 2007, in the way the Russian strategy shifted towards a more aggressive counterbalancing of the West, the Russian leader often weaponizing narratives in order to justify the aggressive behaviour and violation of the UN Charter.

Taking into account the three main phases identified by Dr. Person for a clear timeframe, we will analyse in the following sections the evolution of the Russian strategy and discourse in each of these phases by outlining key elements of Russia's strategy and how they changed over the years shaping its identity into the aggressor that it has become today. Alongside with this, we will analyse the discourse used in key statements of the Russian leader that show how he chose to justify his actions over the years in relation to the Western counterparts and international law.

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[5] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," June 28, 2000, https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm.

[6] Robert Person, "Russian Grand Strategy in the 21st Century," in *Russian Strategic Intentions A Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) White Paper*, May 2019, p. 9.

Russia's Strategic Adaptation: "Pragmatic Accommodation" (2000-2003)

The first phase of "pragmatic accommodation" was representative for the first years' of Putin presidency, when the Russian leader led an accommodating and more or less compromising policy towards the US in order to secure the interests of his country. These included actions such as offering support to NATO after the 9/11 incident, some arguing that the operation on Afghanistan was the policy on which the American and Russian interests have been the closest. Putin's attitude in this period towards the relations with the United States has been rather positive, being willing to acquire closer ties.[7]

This can also be observed in the speech he gave at the Bundestag of the Federal Republic of Germany on the 9/11 incident: "I think **we** all are to blame for what happened, and first and foremost **we**, politicians, to whom the ordinary citizens of our nations have entrusted their security. And this happens first and foremost because **we** have so far failed to recognize the changes that have happened in our world over the past ten years and continue to live in the old system of values: **we** are talking about partnership, but in reality, **we** have not yet learned to trust each other. Today **we** must say once and for all: the Cold War is done with! **We** have entered a new stage of development. **We** understand that without a modern, sound, and sustainable security architecture **we** will never be able to create an atmosphere of trust on the continent, and without that atmosphere of trust there can be no united Greater Europe! Today **we** must say that **we** renounce our stereotypes and ambitions and from now on will jointly work for the security of the people of Europe and the world as a whole."[8] We can observe in this excerpt that Putin uses the pronoun we for a total of eleven times, which shows the cooperative stance that he adopts by trying to involve the hearers as much as possible. He also refers to the Cold War as being 'done with', and to a present where the world is no longer divided in two hostile camps and should rely on partnership and unity within a "Greater Europe". The Russian leader even refused at that time to exclude the chance of Russia joining NATO in an interview with BBC, further showing openness towards a common European security.[9]

The Russian leader gave several interviews that showed a cooperative tone towards his Western counterparts. In a joint interview with President Bush, he acknowledged the differences between the American and Russians states, but was open to work towards an objective that would suit both of their interest: "We differ in the ways and means we perceive that are suitable for reaching the same objective [But] one can rest assured that whatever final solution is found, it will not threaten the interests of both our countries and of the world."[10]

Even his position regarding NATO was a cooperative one in that period of time, as he did not oppose the admission of the former Soviet countries in NATO, stating that "We of

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[7] Andrew C. Kuchins, "That Brief U.S.-Russia Strategic Partnership 15 Years Ago? New Interviews Reveal Why It Derailed," *Washington Post*, December 7, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/23/that-brief-u-s-russia-strategic-partnership-15-years-ago-new-interviews-reveal-why-it-derailed/.

[8] President of Russia, "Speech in the Bundestag of the Federal Republic of Germany," September 25, 2001, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21340.

[9] Steve Rosenberg, "Have 15 Years of Power Gone to Putin's Head?," BBC News, December 31, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30533034.

[10] Bob Kemper, "Bush, Putin Downplay Differences," *Chicago Tribune,* August 20, 2021, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2001-11-16-0111160193-story.html.

course are not in a position to tell people what to do. We cannot forbid people to make certain choices if they want to increase the security of their nations in a particular way."[11] In the same interview, Putin even talked about a possible change of relationship with NATO that will rely on cooperation: Russia acknowledges the role of NATO in the world of today, Russia is prepared to expand its cooperation with this organisation. And if we change the quality of the relationship, if we change the format of the relationship between Russia and NATO, then I think NATO enlargement will cease to be an issue—will no longer be a relevant issue.[12]

If we were to look at key excerpts from Putin's statements in this period of time, the main themes that can be identified are as follows:

Discourse excerpts	Main theme
"we are talking about partnership"	Partnership
"create an atmosphere of trust on the continent"	Cooperation
"without (…) trust there can be no united Greater Europe"	
"jointly work for the security of the people of Europe and the world as a whole"[13]	Common security
"Russia is prepared to expand its cooperation with this organisation [NATO]"[14]	
"reaching the same objective"[15]	Shared interests

Looking at the main themes that are present in Putin's statements, it is clear that the Russian leader saw the prospect of a partnership with the West as best suited for securing his interests at that time. Nonetheless, looking back now at the stance Russia has taken between 2000-2003, it can be considered an attempt to adapt to the new world order that was dominated by the American hegemon and its norms. Counterbalancing a hegemon and the *status quo* established by it would have been too costly in the sense that one could risk compromising one's interests, such as economic expansion and security.[16]

Russia's Increasing Assertiveness: "Soft-Balancing" (2004-2007)

Although the Russian leader seemed initially not to be bothered by the expansion of NATO to the Baltic states, this would soon change, as in the following period Russia's stance on this topic became increasingly critical, beginning to see NATO expansion as a security threat. The invasion of Iraq represented further ground for disagreement, as the President Vladimir Putin was a vehement opponent of the invasion of Iraq, condemning US's

[11] Michael Yoch, "NPR News: Vladimir Putin: Transcript of Robert Siegel Interview," November 15, 2001, https://legacy.npr.org/news/specials/putin/nprinterview.html.
[12] *Ibidem*.
[13] President of Russia, "Speech in the Bundestag."
[14] Yoch, *art. cit.*
[15] Kemper, *art. cit*.
[16] Stephen G Brooks, William C. Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 60-63.

unilateralism and insisting on working through the United Nations. The UNSC permanent membership also represented an important tool for Russia to counterbalance the West, as it has also done in the case of Iraq.[17]

After NATO expanded into Eastern Europe and after the Iraq invasion in 2003, Russia increasingly started to counterbalance the West employing soft-balancing strategies. It seemed that the costs of counterbalancing were now lower than the benefit of securing his interests, namely his regional security and influence. The soft-balancing strategy is also argued to be common in a unipolar order, where the target of soft-balancing is a hegemonic power, in our case the US.[18] In this sense, Pape argues that this change of strategy was not necessarily the US's incontestable power, but rather the fact the only: "until recently [has] the United States enjoyed a robust reputation for nonaggressive intentions towards major powers and lesser states beyond its own hemisphere."[19]

According to Pape, when a state employs soft-balancing towards another state what we are talking about is: "not a direct confrontation of the unipolar leader's military supremacy, but it employs non-military tools such as delaying, complicating or increasing costs for it, and others, such as formatting alliances"[20]

Russia's attempt to secure its own sphere of influence was the core element of its soft-balancing strategy. To this end, the Russian leader made use of several non-military alignment tools such as its strategic partnership to China which was not in a classical partnership that ensures mutual military support, but rather a partnership that is simply meant to mutually enhance their international influence and achieve their interests.[21] Both powers have pursued a revisionist agenda regarding the American hegemony and have often found common ground in international forums. As two permanent members of the UNSC, they often aligned with each other at the UNSC table, for example by focusing on the importance of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, criticizing the American interventionism. They have as well developed the concept of 'sovereign democracy' as they regard the Western democratic ambitions as a threat to their rule. The concept stands for the states' sovereignty, implying that foreign implications in domestic movements for democracy are nothing else than interfering in the country's internal affairs.[22]

Economy is also considered to be an important tool of soft-balancing for Russia, its impressive gas and oil revenues being an important tool of energetic diplomacy that its leaders have used in order to consolidate its influence in Europe and Asia. Its major energy supply to

[17] T. V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* vol. 30, no. 1/2005, pp. 46-71.
[18] Chaka Ferguson, "Soft Power as the New Norm: How the Chinese-Russian Strategic Partnership (Soft) Balances American Hegemony in an Era of Unipolarity," PhD diss., Florida International University, 2011, p. 64.
[19] Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* vol. 30, no. 1/2005, p. 9, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137457.
[20] *Ibidem*, p. 17.
[21] Ferguson, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.
[22] Chaka Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian 'Strategic Partnership'," *Journal of Strategic Studies* vol. 35, no. 2/April 2012, p. 213, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2011.583153.

Europe that created economic dependencies gave Russia leverage over European nations, challenging US's influence in the region.[23]

Increasing its economic power is one of the main strategies Russia has pursued in order to re-emerge as a great power and be able to assert and achieve its interests. In his first term Putin's approach of improving Russia's economy also meant its integration into the global economy, introducing several modernizing reforms and acquiring closer ties with the West. Putin's scepticism regarding the West's democratic ambitions in Russia loosened the relationship with the West, his determination not to comply with the West anymore being reinforced by the boom of Russia's GDP from 2000 to 2008. [24] As the Russian economy is dependent on oil revenues, one of the best ways to increase its economic capacity was by raising oil and gas prices.[25]

Also, as a soft-balancing strategy, the Russian leader was a strong advocate of the multipolar world in this period of time, even pleading for cooperative relations with the West. This can also be seen in a statement he made in 2003: "We believe here, in Russia, that the future international security architecture must be based on a multipolar world. This is the main thing that unites us. I am absolutely confident that the world will be predictable and stable only if it is multipolar."[26]

Even though at first his statements on multipolarity seemed to show a cooperative stance, his advocacy for a multipolar world would become with time an attempt to counterbalance the dominance of the Western centre of influence, by trying to challenge the Western norms and promote a balanced distribution of power among multiple power centres, Russia of course being one of them. This can also be seen in the Sino-Russian cooperation through the regional organisation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, in which they both expressed their support for multipolarity and stopping the US from interfering in the region.[27] Furthermore, the position of the Russian leader towards the West would drastically change with the Beslan event in 2004, when Putin shifted his discourse from an open and diplomatic attitude towards a defensive one. This can be seen in the leader's address to the population: "In general, we need to admit that we did not fully understand the complexity and the dangers of the processes at work in our own country and in the world. In any case, we proved unable to react adequately. We showed ourselves to be weak. And the weak get beaten. Some would like to tear from us a "juicy piece of pie". Others help them. They help, reasoning that Russia still remains one of the world's major nuclear powers, and as such still represents a threat to them. And so, they reason that this threat should be removed."[28]

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[23] Ekaterina Piskunova, "Energy Security as a Tool of Soft Balancing in Russian-American Relations under Vladimir Putin," Montreal: University of Montreal Press, 2008, pp. 10-11.
[24] Angela E. Stent, *Putin's World. Russia against the West and with the Rest*, New York: Twelve Hachette Book Group, 2019, pp. 47-48.
[25] Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy. The Return of Great Power Politics*, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019, p. 5.
[26] Russian President Vladimir Putin, quoted in Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security,* vol. 30, no. 1/2005, p. 24.
[27] Brooks, Wohlforth, *op. cit*., pp. 72-73.
[28] President of Russia, "Address by President Vladimir Putin," September 4, 2004, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22589.

The anti-American discourse was further strengthened after the Orange Revolution, when the Russian president accused the US of interfering in Ukraine's elections in the favour of the pro-West candidate, weakening Russia's influence in the former Soviet Union country, and thus undermining its great power status in the region.[29]

Even though at first, he kept a diplomatic stance on the matter, it was clear that he considered the West as culpable in a statement he gave two years after the Revolution: "Our European and American partners decided to support the Orange Revolution even against the Constitution. … First of all, the political result was very problematic, and we see how the situation is developing in Ukraine. Second, if you already provided support and want to continue to provide support, then pay the bill. But you want to have political gains and want us to pay for them. … [The West wants] neither to pay nor to look at things as they are in reality."[30]

If we were to look at key excerpts from Putin's statements in this period of time, the main themes that can be identified are as follows:

Discourse excerpts	Main theme
"the future international security architecture must be based on a multipolar world."[31] "the world will be predictable and stable only if it is multipolar"[32]	Multipolar order
"We showed ourselves to be weak. And the weak get beaten."[33]	Perception of strength
"Russia still remains one of the world's major nuclear powers, and as such still represents a threat to them. And so, they reason that this threat should be removed"[34]	Scepticism towards Western stance
"Our European and American partners decided to support the Orange Revolution even against the Constitution"[35]	West's involvement in Russia's backyard
"you want to have political gains and want us to pay for them. … [The West wants] neither to pay nor to look at things as they are in reality."[36]	Western hypocrisy

To conclude this subchapter, during the soft-balancing period, (2000-2007), the Russian discourse emphasized international law, security, and a multipolar world order, conveying a positive and engaged perspective on international affairs. This is a common soft-balancing discourse, as within a unipolar world there are particular norms for what an appropriate behaviour means. Thus, in order to become a soft-power, states' discourse needs

[29] Robert Person, "Four Myths About Russian Grand Strategy," Centre for Strategic and International Studies, September 22, 2020, https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/four-myths-about-russian-grand-strategy.
[30] President of Russia, "Transcript of Meeting with Participants in the Third Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club," September 9, 2006, http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23789.
[31] Russian President Vladimir Putin, Moscow Itar-Tass, in FBIS, February 9, 2003.
[32] *Ibidem.*
[33] Address by President Vladimir Putin 2004 after the Beslan Event.
[34] *Ibidem.*
[35] Transcript of Meeting with Participants in the Third Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, September 9, 2006.
[36] *Ibidem.*

to adhere to the norms that apply universally, and that is what Russia did.[37] Moreover, soft-balancing also applies to the regional security concerns that Russia gradually voiced. This kind of matters also appear among great power when faced with a hegemon, these often becoming more assertive when it comes down to their regional influence.[38]

Russia's Increasing Aggressiveness: "Asymmetrical Balancing" (2007-Today)

Beginning with the year of 2007, Russia's strategy at counterbalancing the American hegemony has become harsher, Putin's declaration at the Munich Security Conference marking a changing point in Russia's approach:"[W]hat is a unipolar world? […] It is world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within. And this certainly has nothing in common with democracy. Because, as you know, democracy is the power of the majority in light of the interests and opinions of the minority. Incidentally, Russia – we – are constantly being taught about democracy. But for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves.…One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?"[39]

It is clear in the tone of the statement that his approach has drastically shifted from a cooperative towards a defensive one. He accused the US of aggressive behaviour and hypocrisy, perceiving NATO expansionist aspirations as a betrayal of trust and a direct security threat Russia.

In consequence, the Russian strategy in the upcoming period has been characterized by an "asymmetrical balancing", Russia having a more aggressive foreign policy and being more active in pursuing its interests in the international sphere. It has done so by using unconventional means that can be placed between a soft- and a hard-balancing strategy, such as economic warfare, cyber-attacks or propaganda operations, turning into an asymmetric threat for the adversary, rather than a traditional military one. The action that Russia engaged in ever since have to a certain extent been successful in causing "disruptions", proving that Russia is willing to take risks in order to secure its interest. The cyber-attack in April 2007 against Estonia marked the beginning of this period, being argued that it has been carried out by Russian government agents. Moreover, it has also led a disinformation campaign regarding the relocation of a World War II monument in Tallinn, its propaganda provoking the Russian

[37] Yulia Kiseleva, "Russia's Soft Power Discourse: Identity, Status and the Attraction of Power," *Politics*, June 16, 2015, p. 319, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12100.

[38] Mila Larionova, "Conceptualizing Soft Balancing Beyond Cold War. What's Changed, What Remains the Same?," Central European Journal of International and Security Studies, September 30, 2020, p. 74, https://doi.org/10.51870/cejiss.a140303.

[39] Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," February 10, 2007, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Speech_and_the_Following_Discussion_at_the_Munich_Conference_on_Security_Policy.

community in Estonia to take to the streets. Furthermore, the war that Russia led with Georgia has also displayed features of a hybrid war, the invasion being nothing else than a counterbalancing against the West, by undermining its attempt to extend its influence to the Russian border, as previous to the war, NATO declared at the summit in Bucharest that it welcomed Georgia and Ukraine to become members of the organisation.[40]

After securing his third presidency term in 2012, Putin started employing further asymmetric strategies, that this time would be led against Ukraine's prospect of signing an association agreement with the EU. Through the occupation of Crimea and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine, Russia has once again employed "gray zone" methods in an effort to put a stop to West's advance in its neighbourhood and to keep Ukraine under its sphere of influence. An example of Russia's attempt to gain leverage outside its influence sphere would be the Russian intervention in the US presidential elections in 2016, which consisted of was a massive cyber operation against the Democratic Party candidate. This can be considered the peak of its willingness to undermine the US interests through nonconventional means.[41] Information warfare has as well played and important non-military tool to counterbalance the West. In this sense, propaganda, disinformation, and fake news have been an accessible tool kit for Russia for defending its position and justifying its actions.[42] If we were to look at key excerpts from Putin's statements at the beginning of this phase, the main themes that can be identified are as follows:

Discourse excerpts	Main theme
"we – are constantly being taught about democracy. But for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves… One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way"[43]	Western hypocrisy
"The process of NATO expansion has nothing to do with modernization of the alliance… it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust…We have the right to ask, 'Against whom is this expansion directed?"[44]	Security concerns Break of trust
"You don't understand, George, Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territories is Eastern Europe, but the greater part is a gift from us."[45]	Delegitimizing Ukraine as a sovereign state

[40] Pape, *art. cit.,* pp. 9-10.
[41] *Ibidem*, p. 11.
[42] Alexandra Popescu and Teodora Dobre, "Defining Hybrid Warfare. The Russian Experience: An Analysis of Propaganda Mechanisms and Their Importance in Developing Foreign Policy," *Romanian Intelligence Studies Review/Revista Romana de Studii de Intelligence* vol. 23/2020, pp. 69-70.
[43] Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy."
[44] *Ibidem*
[45] RM Staff, "From Accepting NATO Aspirations to 'Denazifying': 20+ Years of Putin's Changing Views on Ukraine", June 16, 2022, https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/accepting-nato-aspirations-denazifying-20-years-putins-changing-views-ukraine

It is clear from these excerpts, that beginning with 2007 Russia has started to weaponize narratives by emphasizing the Russian security concern raised by the NATO expansionism, and accusing the West of being corrupt and hypocritical in order to perpetuate ambiguity around the question of who the aggressor really is: Russia or the West? Moreover, his statement on Ukraine not being a state has the scope to delegitimize Ukraine's sovereignty. These narratives represented the basis for justifying the upcoming actions of Russia in order to secure his interests in the region,[46] namely the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

In this later phase of increasing 'asymmetrical balancing', weaponization of narratives has been one of Russia's main tools in its hybrid war against the West. While it might not be possible to put together all narratives, this article aims to look at two key statements made by the Russian leader from 2007 to nowadays: his statement on Crimea joining Russia and his speech when Russia's invasion of Ukraine was launched. Due to the extensive length of the two statements, we will only include in the article key excerpts that encompass the main themes of the discourse.

First, in *The Address by President of the Russian Federation on Crimea joining Russia* we can identify the following themes:[47]

Discourse excerpts	Main theme
"Residents of Crimea for the first time in history were able to peacefully express their free will regarding their own future. However, what do we hear from our colleagues in Western Europe and North America? They say we are violating norms of international law. Firstly, it's a good thing that they at least remember that there exists such a thing as international law – better late than never"	Critique of Western stance International law
"Crimea referred to the United Nations Charter, which speaks of the right of nations to self-determination. Incidentally, I would like to remind you that when Ukraine seceded from the USSR it did exactly the same thing, almost word for word. Ukraine used this right, yet the residents of Crimea are denied it. Why is that?"	Critique of Western stance UN Charter
"the well-known Kosovo precedent – a precedent our western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country's central authorities."	Comparison with Kosovo
"Pursuant to Article 2, Chapter 1 of the United Nations Charter, the UN International Court"	UN Charter

[46] Lt. Col. Anthony P. Rizzuto, USSF and Dr. Robert S. Hinck, "Putin's Propaganda Power: Examining Putin's Ukraine War Speeches," *Air University*, 2023, p. 1.

[47] President of Russia. "Address by President of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014. http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603.

"And then, they hit Afghanistan, Iraq, and frankly violated the UN Security Council resolution on Libya, when instead of imposing the so-called no-fly zone over it they started bombing it too."	West's actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya
"NATO remains a military alliance, and we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard."	Security Concerns (NATO)

Second, analysing the content of the *Address by the President of the Russian Federation* on the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, we can observe the following main themes:[48]

Discourse excerpts	Main theme
"First a bloody military operation was waged against **Belgrade** […] Western colleagues prefer to forget them, and when we mentioned the event, they prefer to avoid speaking about international law, instead emphasizing the circumstances which they interpret as they think necessary."	Kosovo Critique of Western stance
"Then came the turn of **Iraq, Libya** and **Syria**. The illegal use of military power against Libya and the distortion of all the UN Security Council decisions on Libya ruined the state"	Critique of Western actions in Libya UN Charter
"A similar fate was also prepared for **Syria**. The combat operations conducted by the Western coalition […] without the Syrian government's approval or UN Security Council's sanction can only be defined as aggression and intervention"	Critique of Western actions in Syria UNSC sanctions
"the invasion of **Iraq** without any legal grounds…We witnessed lies made at the highest state level and voiced from the high UN rostrum. As a result, we see a tremendous loss in human life, damage, destruction, and a colossal upsurge of terrorism"	Critique of Western actions in Iraq Western hypocrisy
"in many regions of the world where the United States brought its law and order, this created bloody, non-healing wounds and the curse of international terrorism and extremism."	Critique of Western actions
"This array includes promises not to expand **NATO** eastwards. To reiterate: they have deceived us, or, to put it simply, they have played us. […] Where is justice and truth here? Just lies and hypocrisy all around"	Security concerns Break of trust
"carry out a special military operation. The purpose of this operation is to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kyiv regime. […] to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation."	Humanitarian intervention Delegitimizing Ukraine authorities

[48] *Idem*, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," February 24, 2022, http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67843.

"We do not intend to impose anything on anyone by force… This does not mean that nations cannot enjoy the right to self-determination, which is enshrined in Article 1 of the UN Charter."	Threats to Russian citizens/ genocide UN charter

The narratives employed in the two statements are linked by a thread, even though they are eight years apart. One common thread that represents the main narrative justification of the Russian leader is drawing attention to aggressions perpetuated by others, more precisely, by the West and Ukraine. In both statements Putin refers to the West's actions in Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, in an attempt to draw attention to the Western hypocrisy around interventionism. In this sense, the leader repeatedly refers to international law and norms and how the West chooses to ignore them when it suits their interest, but accuses Russia of violating them, even though Russia's interests are "purely" self-defensive and humanitarian, as well as in agreement with the UN Charter, which he also mentions on multiple occasions. The Russian leader takes every opportunity to criticize the Western stance towards Russia's actions. On the annexation of Crimea, he defends the principle of sovereignty and right to self-determination by drawing upon the self-determination of Ukraine, and even upon that of the US and the unification of Germany, rhetorically asking in what way Crimea's case is different from those cases.

Putin's discourse is designed to appeal to both internal and external audiences. The discourse based on international norms is aimed at external neutral audiences in an attempt to justify Russia's actions as compliant with international law and humanitarian values. This allows neutral parties, for example China, to keep their neutral stance towards Russia's actions. In addressing its adversaries, the US and NATO, Russia makes use of narratives based on security concerns and deterrence. Putin refers to the expansionism of NATO in Eastern Europe as a direct threat to the Russian security, portraying the West's actions and hypocrisy as the catalyser of Russia's unleashed anger, and threatening with an immediate response on behalf of Russia if they would dare to intervene.[49]

On the other hand, when targeting internal audiences, Russia employs a different strategy. For example, when referring to Ukraine authorities, Putin describes them as Nazis and perpetrators of genocide, in an attempt to draw parallels to when Russia fought the Nazis in the Second World War and thus draw support for his invasion and delegitimize the Ukrainian authorities internally. Moreover, it also tries to delegitimize the West, which he portrays as a neo-colonial power, that brings "the curse of international terrorism and extremism"[50] upon many regions of the world. This provocative nuance of his discourse is mainly meant to target internal audiences, in order to maximize internal support for his actions.[51]

The weaponization of narratives around the two events are central in Russia's gray zone warfare. The discourse employed by the Russian leader has spread mistrust and has in consequence significantly affected the relations with the Western nations, leaving little to no room for diplomatic negotiations. Russia's actions undoubtedly violate international law and

[49] Rizzuto and Hinck, *op. cit*., pp. 3-4.
[50] President of Russia, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," February 24, 2022.
[51] Rizzuto and Hinck, *op. cit*., p. 2.

go against the same principles of sovereignty it so ardently defended throughout the 21st century.[52] But despite the fact that its actions are a violation of international law and are largely condemned at the international level, Russia has managed to evade accountability for its actions under the authority of the UN, given its veto-power at the UNSC table. This also causes an erosion of international norms, as when such breaches of international norm remain unpunished, the legitimacy of international law is weakened as well.

Conclusion

To briefly summarize, even though at the beginning of the 21st century (2000-2003) Russia saw as best suited to its interest to take a cooperative and accommodating stance towards the West, its discourse focusing on building a partnership and common security, if we were to look at its discourse beginning with 2004, it gradually became more assertive in order to secure its interests. Starting by advocating for a multipolar order and continuing with a build-up of scepticism towards the West, Putin's policy has ever since started displaying an increasing opposition towards the US and NATO, opposition which became clear beginning with the year of 2007, when the leader shifted his discourse towards a more aggressive one, accusing the West of hypocrisy and of directly threatening Russia's security. Starting with 2007, its strategy would also shift towards an 'asymmetrical balancing', Russia pursuing its interests ever since in a more active way. In this later phase, Russia's efforts to manipulate the information space have been a constant variable across Russian statements, which was intended to provide a narrative justification for its actions. In this sense, if we were to look at the discourse in 2007, the illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014, and the current war with Ukraine, they are all linked by common threads. In his speeches across these events Putin repeatedly brought up variations of the same discourse, trying to create an 'alternative narrative', that Russia's actions are a rightful response to the West's actions[53] (see here the main justifications in the two analysed statements), and that Russia is the saviour of Russian-speakers, its intentions being humanitarian, the manipulation of humanitarian narratives being a key tool for Russia to justify its actions in accordance with international law and protect its legitimacy.[54]

To conclude, it became clear that the myriad of strategies the Russian state made use of over the course of the 21st century have been increasingly aggressive, and the war Russia is carrying out today in Ukraine has been long present in the narratives it employed against the West. Russia has been "at war" with the West all this time, and even though it had to adapt its foreign policy to a world dominated by democratic norms and the West, its one and only objective has been to achieve the Great Power ambitions Putin set out at the beginning of his presidency by all means, namely "to ensure reliable security of the country, to preserve and strengthen its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to achieve firm and prestigious positions in

[52] Peterson, "Russian Strategic Intentions," 2019, p. 131.

[53] Andrew D. Anderson, "The Sources of Russian Information Warfare," PhD diss., School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2019, p. 69.

[54] Julio Bacio Terracino and Craig Matasic, "Disinformation and Russia's War of Aggression against Ukraine: Threats and Governance Responses," Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, November 3, 2022, p. 5, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/37186bde-en.pdf?expires=1711554235&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=B8C47147D717B6FC90D64270E7C70A58.

the world community, most fully consistent with the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power, as one of the most influential centres of the modem world."[55]

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Moldova’s Accession to the European Union: Opportunities and Challenges

Diana Nicoleta Petruț

Abstract. The European Union has been cooperating with the Republic of Moldova within the framework of the Eastern Partnership since 2009, in an effort to strengthen and deepen their relationship. The Russian invasion of Ukraine of February 2022 prompted Moldova to join Ukraine in applying for EU membership, in order to counteract Moscow’s aggressive tendencies. As a result, both countries were given a European perspective and granted candidate status on June 23, 2022. Thus, this article will analyse the EU accession prospects of the Republic of Moldova, by examining the opportunities and challenges that the country is facing on the pathway to EU membership. Romania should play a crucial role in this process, given its strong historical, cultural, and economic ties with Moldova, as well as its experience as a former candidate country and current EU member state. As such, Romania can offer its insights and best practices, while at the same time advocate on Moldova’s behalf at EU level. However, the greatest challenge to EU membership is the issue of Transnistria and its separatist intentions, supported by Russia. Undoubtedly, Moldova has a long way to go before it can meet the conditions to become an EU member state. Still, the decisive step has been taken and the country is not only on the path to EU membership, but also on the path of breaking off with its communist past.

Keywords: Moldova, EU accession, Romania, Russia, Ukraine war

Introduction

The Republic of Moldova submitted its application for EU membership on March 3, 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This decision came after the country has taken decisive steps towards reforms in the two years prior, with a clear mandate from its citizens, as proven by the results of the 2020/2021 elections. These showed a clear alignment of the presidential, executive, and legislative powers on a pro-reform, anti-corruption European path for the first time since the independence of the republic, following a period where the independence of key institutions was seriously threatened. The proximity to Ukraine has made Moldova particularly vulnerable to Russian aggression, and the war is severely affecting the country. Even so, Moldova is actively supporting the refugees fleeing Ukraine, hosting on its territory the highest number of refugees *per capita*. Still, the government is committed to upholding its clear reform aims, especially in the areas of justice, public administration, and the modernisation of the economy, to develop the country and bring benefits to the Moldovan citizens.[1]

As such, his article aims to analyse the EU accession prospects of the Republic of Moldova, by examining the opportunities and challenges that the country is facing on the pathway to EU membership. It will do so by examining the relations between the EU and

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[1] European Commission, “Commission Opinion on the Republic of Moldova’s Application for Membership of the European Union,” Brussels, 2022, p. 1, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/opinion-moldovas-application-membership-european-union_en.

Moldova, including the various EU support initiatives for the country, and by outlining the progress that Moldova has reached in terms of is reform programme. Then it will continue by analysing the opportunities and challenges that might affect its EU aspirations.

The EU-Moldova Relations

The European Union has established relations with the Republic of Moldova since its independence in August 1991, signing a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in November 1994, which entered into force in July 1998.[2] Another important milestone was the launch of the Eastern Partnership in 2009, which included Moldova and five other countries in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, aiming to strengthen and deepen the political and economic relations between them and support sustainable reform processes in the Eastern Partnership countries.[3] Following that, the EU and Moldova signed an Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area in June 2014, which entered into force in July 2016. This led to the strengthening of economic and political ties between the two parties, the promotion of common values, it set out a reform plan and reinforced cooperation in various sectors. The EU acknowledged the European aspirations of Moldova, who committed to reforming and aligning its domestic policies to EU legislation. The revised 2021-2027 Association Agenda, defining priorities for the implementation of the Association Agreement, was adopted in August 2022, focusing on democracy, human rights, and good governance; freedom, security, and justice; and economic, trade and sectoral cooperation.[4]

In terms of funding and support, the EU is the largest provider of financial assistance to Moldova, offering financial and technical support through the Neighbourhood Development and Cooperation Instrument. For the 2021-2024 period, the total amount allocated to Moldova is expected to reach €260 million, supporting investments and reforms in the following sectors: economy, institutions, rule of law, security, environment and climate resilience, digital transformation, gender equality and inclusive society. An EU support package was created for Moldova in June 2023, focusing on five priorities: economic development and connectivity, administrative capacity, energy, security, and strategic communication.[5] Regarding trade and investment, the EU is Moldova's largest trading partner and investor, accounting for 52% of its total trade. In 2021, the EU foreign direct investment in Moldova amounted to €200 million. The total amount of trade in goods with the EU was €7.3 billion in 2022.[6]

Moreover, since July 2022, the EU has increased the import quotas for seven agricultural products, not yet fully liberalised under the EU-Moldova trade agreement, in order to ease the financial pressure felt by Moldovan producers as a result of Russian aggression in Ukraine. This has led overall exports from Moldova to the EU to increase from €1.8 billion in

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[2] *Ibidem*, p. 2.
[3] European Council, "Eastern Partnership," last reviewed February 12, 2024, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/#suspension.
[4] European Commission, "Commission Opinion," p. 2.
[5] European Union, "The EU and Moldova – Factsheet," November 2023, p. 1, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/EU-MD%20FS.pdf.
[6] *Ibidem.*

2021 to €2.6 billion in 2022. In May 2023, the Commission proposed the removal of all tariffs and quotas, granting Moldova one-year full trade liberalisation measures for its exports of agricultural products to the EU until July 2024. Moldova also takes part in the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes initiative, through which the EU has allocated €32 million in investments, in order to help the country ensure secure supply chains and food security.[7]

Energy security is another crucial sector since the start of the war in Ukraine, given Russia's attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure and Gazprom's sharp decrease in energy delivery, which fuelled the energy crisis in Europe. Severely affected, Moldova receives assistance from the EU to improve its energy resilience and ensure stable gas and electricity supplies. This has helped the country to buy gas and electricity from the EU, as it can also take part in the joint gas purchasing mechanism, while at the same time prioritising the reduction in energy demand. The EU is also deploying its rescEU energy reserve to send 36 power generators to Moldova, which will be distributed to 30 hospitals across the country. In May 2023, Moldova reached an agreement with the EU Commission to be associated to the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme, through which it can apply for EU funding for projects in the fields of energy, transport, and digital services.[8]

Furthermore, the EU supports Moldova through the Economic and Investment Plan, investing in flagship projects in strategic areas. Cooperating with European financial institutions, the EU aims to provide up to €1.6 billion in public and private investments, of which €673 million have been allocated for five projects selected together with the Moldovan authorities: anchoring Moldova in the Trans-European Network for Transport, investing in human capital development, direct support for 50,000 Moldovan SMEs, the construction of an inland freight terminal in Chișinău, and the refurbishment of district heating systems in residential buildings in Chișinău and Bălți.[9]

Humanitarian assistance and civil protection is another important area benefitting from EU support, given the fact that Moldova is one of the countries most affected by the war in Ukraine, having faced a wave of over 700,000 refugees entering the country and over 100,000 still on its territory. The EU has offered €48 million to Moldova, in order to assist vulnerable refugees and the families hosting them to ensure their basic needs like food, water, healthcare and shelter, as well as enable Moldovan authorities to establish over 60 Refugee Accommodation Centres across its territory. The Food Programme, with donations from the EU and other donors, delivered more than 1.5 million hot meals for the Ukrainian refugees living in these accommodation centres since March 2022. Through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, 18 EU Member States and Norway have provided assistance in the form of shelter items, medications, food and energy supplies, whilst medical equipment was also mobilised from the rescEU stockpiles from Germany, Hungary and the Netherlands, thanks to a Commission decision.[10]

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[7] European Union, "EU Solidarity with Moldova," June 2023, p. 3, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU_Solidarity_with_Moldova.pdf.
[8] *Ibidem.*
[9] *Ibidem.*
[10] *Ibid*em, p. 4.

With regard to security and resilience, the EU has allocated €8 million to support refugees, cybersecurity, and the fight against disinformation, €87 million through the European Peace Facility for the modernisation of the army to ensure better protection for civilians during crises and emergencies, and €3 million to support the independence of local media. A civilian Common Security and Defence Policy mission, the EU Partnership Mission (EUPM) Moldova, with a budget of €13,3 million, has been established in order to increase security and resilience in the crisis management and hybrid threats sectors, including cybersecurity, and countering foreign information manipulation and interference. For border management and to assist Ukrainian refugees arriving in Moldova, the EU has allocated a further €30 million.[11]

Moldova's EU Accession Bid

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has determined Moldova to submit its application for EU membership on 3 March 2022. On 17 June 2022, an EU Commission Opinion recommended that Moldova be granted candidate status, provided that nine key steps are taken. As a result, the European Council endorsed the Commission Opinion and granted Moldova candidate status on 23 June 2022.[12]

The nine steps included in the Commission Opinion are the following:[13]

1. Complete the newly launched, comprehensive reform of the justice system, to ensure the independence, integrity, transparency, accountability and efficiency across all institutions and prosecution chains, including through effective democratic oversight and efficient use of asset verification; with regard to the Supreme Council Magistracy and its specialised bodies, all the remaining vacant positions must be filled in;
2. Address the issues identified by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Council of Europe/the Venice Commission and implement their recommendations across all these areas;
3. Fight corruption at all levels by moving towards proactive and efficient investigations and a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions, whilst also significantly increasing the implementation of the National Anticorruption Centre recommendations;
4. Reach the commitment to "de-oligarchisation" by abolishing the influence of vested interests in the Moldova's political, economic and public life;
5. Intensify the fight against organised crime, on the basis of increased cooperation with regional, EU and international partners, detailed threat assessments, and improved coordination among law enforcement agencies; adopt a legislative package on asset recovery and a comprehensive framework for fighting against financial crime and money laundering, ensuring it complies with the standards of the Financial Action Task Force;

[11] *Ibidem.*
[12] *Ibidem.*
[13] European Commission, "Commission Opinion," pp. 16-17.

6. Accelerate the implementation of reforms, including public administration reform, in order to provide quality public services; provide and assessment and update of the public administration reform strategy;
7. Fulfil the Public Financial Management reform, including the upgrade of public procurement at all governmental levels;
8. Boost the civil society's participation in decision-making processes at all levels;
9. Enhance the protection human rights, especially those of vulnerable groups, as well as improve gender equality and combat violence against women.

In June 2023, the Commission gave an oral update to the Council on the progress in the nine steps listed above. Later that year, on 8 November, the Commission presented its enlargement report and recommended opening accession negotiations with Moldova.[14] To justify its recommendation, the Commission issued a report detailing the progress achieved by Moldova, the key findings of which will be summarised below.

Regarding the political criteria, the republic has continued the reforms in order to strengthen its democracy and the rule of law, making considerable progress in terms of electoral legislation and addressing the recommendations of the ODIHR and Venice Commission. Whilst a new Electoral Code was adopted in December 2022, the authorities have to implement the legislation by improving the authority, resources, and technical expertise of the Central Election Commission, as well as regulate the involvement of third parties in election campaigns.[15]

The Parliament of Moldova played a crucial role in the EU accession process, supporting the reforms initiated by the government. Still, more efforts have to be made to ensure greater transparency, and the Parliament's Rules of Procedures should be amended more quickly and with a greater involvement of civil society. Maia Sandu's government strived to improve the decision-making transparency democratic accountability mechanisms and ensured a good level of policy planning and coordination, but more efforts need to be made so that the adopted legislation is implemented effectively, and regulatory policy is applied at all governmental levels.[16]

The civil society has been increasingly involved in decision-making, and legal and financial frameworks for civil society organisations (CSOs) are in place. More efforts should be made to improve the quality of public consultation processes and get CSOs more involved in parliamentary debates and policy dialogue at local level.[17]

In regard to public administration reform, some progress has been made and the public administration reform strategy for 2023-2030 is being applied at all levels. A new legislation on civil servants' salaries was adopted, and the country has to continue increasing its capacity to implement the reforms and provide quality public services.[18]

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[14] European Union, "The EU and Moldova," p. 1.
[15] European Commission, "Key Findings of the 2023 Report on the Republic of Moldova," Brussels, November 8, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_5633.
[16] *Ibidem.*
[17] *Ibidem.*
[18] *Ibidem.*

Concerning the judiciary, Moldova has initiated a comprehensive justice system reform, including the vetting of judges and prosecutors in high level positions, in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission. However, there was no significant progress in the prosecution of long-standing criminal cases and high-profile corruption cases, and the new judicial map reforming the court system needs to be finalised.[19]

Some progress has been made regarding the fight against corruption, which needs to be maintained to eliminate the blocks to the reform process. The National Anticorruption Centre and the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office were reformed, there was a slight increase in the number of investigations and convictions related to corruption, and the law on whistle-blowers was also amended.[20]

In the fight against organised crime, Moldova has made good progress including the fight against financial crime and adopted a new legislation establishing a seizure and confiscation mechanism. The country has signed a Status Agreement with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and upheld its commitments in regard to the fight against arms trafficking, drugs, human trafficking, and migrant smuggling. The law on the regime of arms and ammunition for civilian use was revised in March 2023, to ensure its compliance with the EU *acquis*. Also, in April 2023, Moldova adopted laws to prevent and combat the financing of terrorism.[21]

With respect to human rights, the government has committed itself to uphold its obligations under international law and started implementing the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, by adopting programmes on strengthening gender equality and support to the Roma. However, people belonging to minority groups, the disabled, and the LGBTIQ community continue to face discrimination including in the labour market, and detention conditions in prisons are inadequate, exceed their capacity and need to be addressed.[22]

In terms of freedom of expression, Moldova has a pluralistic media environment, and the legislation contains provisions to prevent the concentration of media and ensure transparency of media ownership, which have to be fully implemented. Political bias in state media has to be addressed, as well as disinformation in media, especially on social media and other online sources. To limit Russian disinformation, six TV stations that rebroadcast content from Russia were suspended in December 2022. The harassment and intimidation of journalists is still an issue primarily in Găgăuzia, with several attempts reported in 2022.[23]

As it can be seen, Moldova has achieved moderate success in its reform efforts, but the results are noteworthy, nonetheless. As a result, the European Council has decided to open accession negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine on December 14-15, 2023, marking a historic moment for the two countries. At the same summit, Georgia was granted the status of

[19] *Ibidem.*
[20] *Ibidem.*
[21] *Ibidem.*
[22] *Ibidem.*
[23] *Ibidem.*

candidate country, as recommended by the Commission.[24] Against this background, Moldova's President Maia Sandu announced her intention to organise a referendum on Moldova's accession to the EU and her new candidacy for the presidential elections. A few days later, the Parliament amended the country's Electoral Code so that the referendum and presidential elections could be organised simultaneously, scheduled for the fall of 2024. According to the Parliament's president, Igor Grosu, the proposal for a referendum had been set forth by representatives of the opposition and should terminate the speculations about the geopolitical choice of Moldova's citizens and whether or not they want to join the EU.[25] However, given the Russian influence that is still very present in Moldova, organising such a referendum might be a risky move, as a negative result would jeopardise all of Moldova's efforts and progress towards EU membership so far. If President Maia Sandu manages to mobilise the pro-European electorate for the presidential elections, then the chances of a resounding "yes" vote are much greater and such a result would legitimise the government's actions and her new presidential mandate as well.

Opportunities for Accession

Moldova should take advantage of the opportunities at its disposal to advance on its EU accession path. First of all, the current European climate is favourable towards this goal. The Russian invasion of Ukraine provides, quite ironically for Russia, a context where public opinion in both the EU and Moldova is much more open towards EU accession and enlargement. While Russia wanted to curb the European aspirations of Ukraine, its actions generated the opposite effect in both Ukraine and Moldova, who submitted their EU membership applications simultaneously. Not only that, but the EU leaders are also committed to ensure Moldova's European path, as repeatedly stated by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Of course, the accession process is quite long and complex, but such a favourable context does not appear very often, so Moldova should take advantage of it while it lasts.

Secondly, the presidential elections that will take place in the fall of 2024 can provide another window of opportunity for Moldova. As stated above, President Maia Sandu has announced her intention to candidate for a second term on a pro-European, EU accession-driven platform.[26] Should she achieve victory, she would gain four important years to accelerate the reforms needed for EU membership. Of course, if the Party of Action and Solidarity, founded by President Sandu, wins the parliamentary elections of 2025, this would further enhance the government's efforts and commitments. Taking into account the results of the reform programme so far, Maia Sandu has very good chances of securing victory, further proving Moldova has chosen the European path.

[24] European Commission, "European Leaders Decide to Open Accession Negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova in a Historic Summit," Brussels, December 18, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ac_23_6711.

[25] Corneliu Rusnac, "The Referendum on Moldova's Accession to the EU: A Risky Political Manoeuvre?," *Veridica*, January 28, 2024, https://www.veridica.ro/en/editorials/the-referendum-on-moldovas-accession-to-the-eu-a-risky-political-maneuver.

[26] *Ibidem.*

Furthermore, Romania is an important ally at EU level that will be of great help to Moldova, being able to provide its expertise, insights, and best practices. Given the very strong economic, cultural, and political relations between the two countries, it is in Romania's interest to ensure that Moldova's EU aspirations take centre stage on the EU policy agenda, alongside the war in Ukraine. As such, Romania has been an active promoter and mentor of Moldova's EU accession and made conscious efforts in this regard.[27] For example, ahead of the European Council meeting in June 2023, it was at Romania's initiative that the EU Member States requested he Commission to elaborate a support package for Moldova, which will focus on five priorities: economic development and connectivity, administrative capacity, energy, security, and strategic communication.[28]

Romania's role does not end here, as the country has initiated various projects to support Moldova's path to EU membership. In terms of energy security, Romania provided about 80%-90% of the electricity needs of Moldova in 2022, as the country's economy and energy supply was negatively affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[29] On February 11, 2022, the two countries signed an agreement regarding the implementation of the technical and financial assistance programme, through which Romania has pledged €100 million as non-refundable aid to Moldova, for an implementation period of seven years. The agreement aims to: intensify the cooperation between the two countries and develop the bilateral strategic partnership; connect Moldova to the EU through Romania; promote the reform process undertaken by Moldova required for EU accession; support Moldova's EU integration process; enhance Moldova's development and reduce economic and social discrepancies; and strengthen Moldova's resilience in the face of destabilising forces.[30] The creation of the Support Platform for the Republic of Moldova in 2022 is another project launched at the initiative of Romania, Germany and France, aiming to provide political, financial and material assistance and expertise for the democratic reform process to Moldova, by focusing on six pillars: humanitarian effort, energy, the fight against corruption, border management, financial assistance, and administrative reform and public finance management.[31]

Moreover, the launch of the EU Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM Moldova) in May 2023, which is led by Romanian diplomat Cosmin Dinescu, is another important initiative, which focuses on increasing Moldova's internal security sector by contributing to enhancing its crisis management structures, its ability to address hybrid threats, including foreign

[27] Hugo Blewett-Mundy, "Romania Gets Moldova (and the EU Doesn't)," Centre for European Policy Analysis, April 13, 2023, https://cepa.org/article/romania-gets-moldova-and-the-eu-doesnt/.
[28] European Union, "EU Support Package for the Republic of Moldova – Factsheet," June 2023, p. 2, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3562.
[29] Reuters, "Romania Provides 80%-90% of Moldova's Energy Needs – Minister", November 21, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/romania-provides-80-90-moldovas-energy-needs-minister-2022-11-21/.
[30] Government of Romania, "Romania Provides Support to the Republic of Moldova in Strategic Areas," October 13, 2022, https://gov.ro/en/news/romania-supports-the-republic-of-moldova-in-strategic-areas.
[31] Government of Republic of Moldova, "Moldova Support Platform," accessed February 29, 2024, https://gov.md/en/moldova-support-platform#:~:text=The%20Moldova%20Support%20Platform%20is,Union%2C%20G7%20nations%2C%20international%20financial.

information manipulation and interference, and cybersecurity.[32] Last but not least, Romania played a key role in the adoption of a new EU sanctions regime on 30 May 2023, aimed at combatting destabilising actions against Moldova, with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs raising strong support from EU Member States and institutions for the initiative, which was adopted in record time.[33] All of these actions and initiatives prove that Romania is a credible partner and can offer considerable assistance to Moldova on its EU accession path.

Challenges to Accession

Still, the Republic of Moldova faces many challenges that must be addressed in order for its accession process to be finalised. While Russia's war on Ukraine has created a favourable international context for accession, it severely affected Moldova in many ways, creating a refugee crisis, an energy crisis, inflation, and national security issues. More than that, since February 2023, Russia has intensified its hybrid war against Moldova, employing tactics such as cyberattacks, spreading propaganda, fake news, and disinformation, sowing social unrest, and issuing bogus bomb threats, in order to destabilise the country. President Maia Sandu has declared that Russian-backed proxies might attempt an armed coup under the guise of opposition protests.[34] Sandwiched between the EU and Ukraine, the small nation was hit hard by these problems, and although the EU has mobilised considerable efforts to help Moldova address them, they will only become worse as the war rages on. With an end to hostilities hardly in sight, Moldova must receive all the help it can get to ensure its independence and territorial integrity.

Moreover, although Moldova has achieved significant progress in terms of its reforms, problems still persist, especially related to the justice system, the fight against corruption, public administration, aligning the economy to EU standards, to name but a few. As stated in the EU Commission report on Moldova, while reforms have been initiated, more efforts need to be made to sustain and implement them.[35] Aligning national legislation to the EU *acquis* is a lengthy and complex process, and the Moldovan authorities have to be committed to it long-term. Another challenge stems from this, as elections are scheduled to take place in Moldova in 2024 and 2025. These are both a window of opportunity, should pro-European President Maia Sandu win a second term in office, but also provide a challenge to the country, as pro-Russian forces could return to power. The political situation in Moldova is quite volatile, so the President has to make sure to mobilise her pro-European electorate for the presidential elections and EU referendum scheduled for the fall of 2024, as well as for the parliamentary elections of 2025.

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[32] European Union, "European Union Partnership Mission Moldova – Factsheet," June 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/Factsheet%20-%20EUPM%20Moldova.pdf.

[33] Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "MFA Welcomes the Adoption of the First Lists of Persons Sanctioned under the EU Sanctions Regime Aimed at Countering Destabilising Actions Against the Republic of Moldova, as Proposed by the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs," May 30, 2023, https://www.mae.ro/en/node/62049.

[34] European Parliament, "Three Eastern Partnership Neighbours: Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus," April 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/171/three-eastern-partnership-neighbours-ukraine-moldova-and-belarus.

[35] European Commission, "Key Findings of the 2023 Report on the Republic of Moldova," Brussels, November 8, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_5633.

Externally, the fact that the European Parliament and many European states are also holding elections in 2024 might prove to be a challenge for Moldova's accession. This is because these elections will greatly influence the direction taken by the EU in the next few years, and the current wave of opportunity might be curbed if Eurosceptic parties win the elections. Political fragmentation is expected to remain a key trend in Europe, with many mainstream parties being expected to include some of the more radical policies trumped by the far right and far left into their policy programmes. Polls suggest that extremist parties will secure important gains in the European Parliament elections in June 2024, which will greatly influence the EU's position on key issues such as immigration, climate change and enlargement,[36] which will in turn affect Moldova's EU accession path.

However, by far the greatest challenge to Moldova's EU accession are the two Russian-backed regions, Transnistria and Găgăuzia. Concerning Transnistria, although EU leaders have assured Moldova that it can join the bloc even without controlling Transnistria, the situation in the breakaway region still poses a big challenge. Chișinău hopes that, through the reforms and laws necessary for EU accession, the citizens living in Transnistria would be exposed indirectly to the EU through Moldova and consider it more appealing that the current situation in the region. One important issue that needs to be tackled is the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria, which means that solving the conflict depends on the will of Moscow.[37] However, knowing Russia, such a scenario is highly unlikely, so the issue will persist. In a meeting that took place in Chișinău in July 2023, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borell said that Moldova would have to decide on its own what to do with the Transnistrian issue, citing the case of Cyprus which joined the EU despite territorial problems. Still, such statements are most likely directed at Moscow and Tiraspol, to prevent them from blackmailing Moldova on its path to the EU but are not enough to grant accession. On the other hand, since Ukraine closed its border with Transnistria in the wake of the Russian invasion, Chișinău has gained the full control over trade conducted with the region. Moldova, and in effect Transnistria, has also escaped its dependency on Russian gas, which was previously used as leverage, so Transnistria has never been so dependent on the goodwill of Chișinău and so vulnerable to its pressure.[38] Nonetheless, the recent developments in the region are worrying to say the least. On February 28, 2024, pro-Russian officials in Transnistria requested Moscow's "protection" against the Moldovan authorities, citing increasing economic and social pressure from Chișinău. The Russian Foreign Ministry's response was that protecting the interests of the "compatriots" from Transnistria was one of Moscow's priorities and that it will analyse the request very carefully. The Moldovan government dismissed the event as

[36] The Economist Intelligence, "Europe: Elections to Watch in 2024," November 17, 2023, https://www.eiu.com/n/europe-elections-to-watch-in-2024/.
[37] Evghenii Ceban, "Transnistria Conflict Could Complicate Moldova's Hard Road to the EU," Open Democracy, October 26, 2023, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/transnistria-moldova-european-union-russia-breakaway-reintegration/.
[38] *Ibidem.*

another propaganda attempt, declaring that the region is aligned with the goal of peace and security of Moldova and that there are no dangers of escalation or destabilisation.[39]

In a similar move, authorities from Găgăuzia accused the Moldovan government of "oppressing" people's rights in the region and asked Russia for support and to continue maintaining close ties with Găgăuzia.[40] The President of the Russian Federation Council, Valentina Matvienko, replied that Russia is watching with great sadness the events happening in Moldova, adding that Russia will offer all the necessary support in order to strengthen and deepen its ties with the region. Both Transnistria and Găgăuzia are claiming to be affected by the new Customs Code that entered into force at the beginning of January, which obliges them to pay their customs duties to the central budget, and not to the local budgets as it was before.[41] These events echo very clearly those that preceded the Russian invasion of Ukraine, when Russian-backed forces in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine requested Moscow for assistance and protection. In the same vein, Moscow could send forces to the two Moldovan regions, especially since it already has "peacekeepers" stationed in Transnistria. Given that the war in Ukraine has not turned out as President Putin was planning, gaining control of the two Moldovan regions would give him a reason to boast about. While it is not clear what his next move will be, it is clear that these actions are aimed at destabilising Moldova and spreading Russian propaganda.

Conclusion

To conclude, this article has aimed to analyse the EU accession prospects of the Republic of Moldova, by examining the opportunities and challenges that the country is facing on the pathway to EU membership. It has done so by examining the relations between the EU and Moldova, including the various EU support initiatives for the country, and by outlining the progress that Moldova has reached in terms of is reform programme. Then it continued by analysing the opportunities and challenges that might affect its EU aspirations. The December 2023 decision of the European Council to open accession negotiations with Moldova is a very auspicious landmark for the country's EU accession. The main opportunities that Moldova should take advantage of including the favourable European climate for enlargement generated by the war in Ukraine, the elections scheduled for 2024/2025, and the close ties with Romania, who initiated various projects to offer assistance to Moldova. As an EU Member State with an intimate understanding of Moldova and the challenges it faces on the European path, Romania is central to how to EU navigates the new security situation in its Eastern Neighbourhood.

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[39] Holly Ellyatt, "West Watches for Putin's Next Move after Breakaway Region asks Moscow to 'Protect' It from Moldova," CNBC, February 29, 2024, https://www.cnbc.com/2024/02/29/putin-could-announce-russian-troops-will-enter-transnistria-region.html.

[40] Alexander Tanas, "Moldovan Regional Leader in Moscow as President Fears Destabilisation," Reuters, March 1, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moldovan-regional-leader-moscow-president-fears-destabilisation-2024-03-01/.

[41] DIGI24, "Și Găgăuzia Cere "Ajutor" la Moscova Împotriva Moldovei, la Două Zile după Transnistria. "Nimeni nu Poate să ne Interzică Asta" (Găgăuzia is also asking for help from Moscow against Moldova, two days after Transnistria. No one can deny us that), March 1, 2024, https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/bascana-gagauziei-s-a-dus-la-moscova-sa-ceara-ajutorul-rusiei-in-fata-moldovei-il-vom-acorda-nimeni-nu-poate-sa-ne-interzica-asta-2707049.

These challenges refer to the negative effects of the war in Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova, issues regarding the reforms, the risk that pro-Russian forces might return to power following the Moldovan elections, the results of the 2024 elections in Europe and the European Parliament, and last but not least, Moscow's attempts at destabilising the country via its proxies in Transnistria and Găgăuzia. Especially the Transnistrian issue needs to be addressed to facilitate the country's EU membership. Thus, Moldova has to keep the pace of reforms and not succumb to internal and external destabilising factors, as well as take advantage of the wave of opportunity currently at its disposal.

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Ukraine's Path to EU Membership: Overcoming Obstacles And Aspirations

Eugeniusz Kuznikow-Wyszynsky

Abstract. Before Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine, together with its EU partners, continued to cooperate on rapprochement. However, amid the coronavirus crisis and imperfect reform of the Ukrainian system, no real political solutions for accession were considered. A full-scale Russian offensive in 2022 changed everything - the lives of Ukrainians and the positions of European leaders. On February 2022, the Ukrainian President signed Ukraine's application for membership of the EU. After handing over all the documents, on June 2022, the European Council at a summit in Brussels adopted a historic decision on granting Ukraine EU candidate status. Along with EU candidate status, Ukraine received a series of recommendations from the EU, the implementation of which was a condition for moving on to the next stage – membership negotiations (should be a "green light" from the 27 EU countries to start negotiations). But while there is a war with Russia, there are many uncertain moments. Brussels demanded that Kyiv complete the reform of the judiciary, and implement laws on oligarchs, the media, and national minorities. The article analyses how the attitudes of European leaders and societies have changed toward EU membership for Ukraine and whether Ukrainians themselves have changed their aspirations for EU membership, as well as what obstacles Ukraine has on the path to European integration. The author comments on Ukraine's position on its path to the EU: how far the country has progressed and how realistic the prospect of joining the bloc is.

Keywords: Ukraine accession, European Union, Ukraine war, acquis communautaire

How Ukraine is Moving to the EU

European organisations are a form of both political and economic interactions within the global and regional pan-European space, formed based on treaties and several other agreements that define their scope of activity. The complexity of the European institutional system is intensified by the expanding subject field of activity of European organisations, and the growing development of integration and disintegration processes in Europe. European organisations determine the possible conditions of movement towards deeper political and economic integration with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Baltic States, Commonwealth of Independent States.

Entry into the organisations of the European institutional system requires candidate countries to meet a number of political and economic conditions. The decision-making mechanism is one of the main stages in the functioning of an international and European organisation. The political process is realized in the decision-making mechanism. The decision-making mechanism consists of procedures for considering an issue and procedures for voting on the issue, which are components of a single process. The increase of actors in international relations due to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, and the Commonwealth of Independent States has led to the complication in the functioning of

European organisations, the decision-making process, and the assessment of the balance of political and military forces. All structures of the European institutional system had to adjust their tasks and functions and adapt them to the new conditions.

The Council of Europe was the first organisation of this number to admit Central and Eastern European countries as well as the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Of all the most influential European organisations, the European Union is the most attractive and desirable goal, primarily from an economic point of view, for all the above countries. Membership in the Council of Europe is a prerequisite for joining the European Union. In the early 1990s, the European Community, later transformed into the Union as a result of the Maastricht Treaty, was the main actor of the European institutional system, development of integration and cooperation among European countries. The European Union became the most important goal for the Eastern European states, the Baltic States, and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

For most states, their main foreign policy priorities are centred in the geographical region where they are located. Therefore, relations with neighbouring countries are always of priority, key importance, and constitute the first circle of diplomats' concerns. For the European Union, these are relations with the post-Soviet states. One of the countries that Brussels is particularly interested in is Ukraine. It is the largest post-Soviet state after Russia in terms of size, population, and economic potential. Ukraine's geographical location puts it in a good position in Europe, making it a key regional player with a significant impact on the security, stability, and development of the entire continent. Ukraine is therefore of strategic importance to Brussels.

After the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine, for the first time in its history, had to search for its place in the international community and the world economy and to develop the main directions of its foreign policy in a rather complicated domestic political environment.

The strategic foreign policy path to Europe was chosen by Ukraine immediately after gaining independence. Ukraine's path to the European Union began in 1993 when the parliament confirmed the intention to develop cooperation with the EU in the relevant resolution. In 1993, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a resolution "On the main directions of Ukraine's foreign policy", in which it declared Ukraine's intention to become a member of the European Communities.[1]

In 1994, Ukraine and the EU signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which entered into force in 1998.[2] In 1996, at a meeting of the Council of Europe, then President Leonid Kuchma first announced Ukraine's desire to become a full member of the European Union.[3]

[1] "Про Основні Напрями Зовнішньої Політики України" (Resolution on the Main Directions of Ukraine's Foreign Policy), *Офіційний вебпортал парламенту України* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine), March 18, 1993, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3076-12#Text.

[2] Cordis.Europa.Eu, "EU/Ukraine Partnership and Cooperation Agreement," CORDIS | European Commission, June 21, 1994, https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/2672-euukraine-partnership-and-cooperation-agreement.

[3] Speech made to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe by Leonid Kuchma - President of Ukraine, Tuesday, April 23, 1996, http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/Speeches/Speech-XML2HTML-EN.asp?SpeechID=129.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Ukraine's foreign policy was declaratively based on the principle of equidistant balance between the Russian Federation and the Euro-Atlantic international communities. Nevertheless, as early as during the presidency of L. Kuchma in 1996-2005, work was underway to prepare for potential integration with the European Union; after Yushchenko came to power, this process became a priority. From 2005-2010, the government maintained confrontational relations with Russia, which was considered an integral part of its Western-oriented foreign policy.[4]

The 2000s in the relations between Ukraine and the EU were remembered for the deepening of economic and political cooperation: the Ukraine-EU Summit began to be held regularly. In 2006, Ukraine unilaterally established a visa-free regime for citizens of EU member states, and in 2007 large-scale preparation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU began.

Yanukovych took over as president of Ukraine in 2010 and, despite predictions, did not suspend integration work with the European Union. During the first year of his presidential term, Yanukovych outlined the foreign policy course chosen by his team - good-neighbourly relations with Russia, the desire to integrate into the European Union, using good relations, first of all, with Poland and France, a certain distance from the United States of America, as the core of the NATO bloc. Yanukovych was held hostage to Ukraine's difficult geopolitical position because, on the one hand, he was an openly pro-Russian politician and had to fulfil the expectations of his broad electorate, but, on the other hand, an abrupt halt to integration processes with the EU would have been seen as a confrontational act by Brussels, which would have prevented him from being able to fulfil the expectations of his broad electorate.[5]

Because of these factors, Ukraine continued systematic work to expand integration contacts with the EU. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the law "On the Fundamentals of Domestic and Foreign Policy", which reflects Ukraine's attempt to reach a conceptual compromise between Russia and the West. The document clearly outlines Ukraine's long-term aspirations to become a member of the European Union.[6]

Negotiations on a new basic treaty between Ukraine and the European Union to replace the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement in force at the time were launched in March 2007 and actually continued with several interruptions over the following years. On November 11, 2011, the final 21st round of negotiations on the Association Agreement was held in Brussels, during which all provisions of the text of the Agreement were agreed upon. On 19 December 2011, during the Fifteenth EU-Ukraine Summit in Kyiv, both sides officially declared the conclusion of the negotiations on the Agreement, and on 30 March 2012 in Brussels, the heads of the negotiating delegations initialled the text of the Association Agreement.

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[4] Mykola Riabchuk, "Fuzzy Borderlands: Ukrainian Identity at the Crossroad of East and West," *Przeglad Polityczny* vol. 59/2003, p. 132.

[5] Anders Åslund, "The Maidan and Beyond: Oligarchs, Corruption, and European Integration," *Journal of Democracy* vol. 25, no. 3/July 2014, p. 68.

[6] "О Принципах Внутренней и Внешней Политики," n.d. (Law of Ukraine dated July 1, 2010, No. 2411-VI On the fundamentals of domestic and foreign policy), https://kodeksy.com.ua/ka/o_printsipah_vnutrennej_i_vneshnej_politiki.htm.

Returning to the subject of the association agreement with the EU, in 2007-2011, Ukraine negotiated a new basic document - the association agreement (an agreement between the EU and a non-member state on the basis of which cooperation in such spheres as politics, trade, culture and security is carried out). The parties initialled it in March 2012. However, the signing, scheduled for November 2013, was postponed at the initiative of the Ukrainian government due to the difficult economic situation in the country. This decision became the starting point of the political crisis in Ukraine. Mass protests in Kiev, after the then President Viktor Yanukovych announced the suspension of the European integration process, turned into violent clashes, and in February 2014, there was a change of power in Ukraine (Petro Poroshenko became President). The new government declared to continue the course of European integration. As part of bringing its legislation in line with EU norms, Ukraine started reforms in the areas of electoral law, public administration, judiciary, etc.

In March 2014, Ukraine and the European Union signed the political part of the association agreement. The political part of the Association Agreement includes the preamble, Article One and Sections One, Two and Seven. In the preamble, the EU recognizes Ukraine's European aspirations and welcomes its European choice, including its commitments to develop a sustainable democracy and market economy. It also states that democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are key elements of this agreement. The preamble also states respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of Ukraine's borders. In addition, this part talks about political association and economic integration, combating organised crime, visa liberalization and so on. It is also about strengthening co-operation in the areas of justice, freedom, and security to ensure the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. For his part, the Ukrainian prime minister said that the signing of the political part of the agreement with the EU was a historic moment not only for Ukraine, but also for the whole of Europe. On the eve of the signing, the Ukrainian prime minister reiterated that Ukraine's final goal is full membership in the EU. The political part of the association agreement already came into force in November 2014.[7]

On January 1, 2016, the agreement between the European Union and Ukraine on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), which is part of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement signed in June 2014, came into force.[8] Ukraine made the biggest leap towards the European Union during the presidency of Petro Poroshenko. Then, in particular, a deepened and comprehensive free trade zone began to operate between the EU and Ukraine.

[7] Since 2014, the EU has been providing macro-financial assistance to Ukraine (macro-financial assistance loans are financed by EU borrowing on capital markets, so the funds are provided to the recipient country in the form of a loan on similar financial terms). At the end of January 2022, the European Commission reported that by that time the EU had managed to allocate more than €17bn to Ukraine in the form of grants and loans, including humanitarian aid and social and economic development assistance. Of this money, €5.9bn are macro-financial assistance programmes, the main purpose of which is to restructure and help service Ukraine's other debts. The €9.5bn are soft loans from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank, and €1.7bn are bilateral cooperation programmes with EU countries. In 2022, the European Parliament also approved a decision to provide Ukraine with a new macro-financial assistance package of €1.2bn (most of the funds are aimed at servicing Ukraine's external debt).

[8] EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, April 15, 2021, https://ukraine-eu.mfa.gov.ua/en/2633-relations/torgovelno-ekonomichne-spivrobitnictvo-ukrayina-yes/zona-vilnoyi-torgivli-mizh-ukrayinoyu-ta-yes.

Together with the visa-free regime for Ukrainians, this should improve the economic situation of Ukraine and, in particular, reduce dependence on Russia in strategic industries.

Already on September 1, 2017, the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union came into force in full. In particular, the Agreement concerns the following sectoral areas: macroeconomic cooperation, public financial management, statistics, space, science and technology, industrial policy and entrepreneurship, information society, tourism, and others.

On February 7, 2019, on the initiative of Petro Poroshenko, the Verkhovna Rada made changes to the Constitution of Ukraine, which set the course for full membership in the European Union and NATO.[9]

Ukraine's Path to the EU

The full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation in February 2022 did not slow down, but even accelerated the European integration of Ukraine. On the fifth day of the war, on February 28, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky signed the application for Ukraine's membership in the EU. On June 22, 2022, the European Council officially granted Ukraine the status of a candidate for joining the European Union. In March 2022, already in a state of war, Ukraine joined the united energy system of continental Europe ENTSO-E earlier than planned (after the end of the war, Ukraine and Europe will have new opportunities for the joint development of electricity markets and support for the "green transition").

EU leaders have unanimously granted Ukraine the status of a candidate for EU membership at a summit in Brussels. Moldova was also granted the same status. The decision was made during a meeting of the European Council with the participation of the heads of state and government of the 27 EU member states on 23-24 June in Brussels. The main topic on the agenda of the meeting was strengthening the security and stability of the EU, which also included the issue of granting Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia the status of candidates for EU membership. Further preparations for membership will involve completing a comprehensive transformation of all sectors, which will create conditions for the country to live following the principles of the European Union and its laws aimed at protecting every citizen and business.

This will create the conditions for bringing the standard of living, welfare, and legal protection of Ukrainians closer to that of other EU countries. The European Commission will continuously support Ukraine in this by providing the necessary advice and other assistance.

The European Commission is committed to continually assisting Ukraine by offering essential guidance and support. Attaining candidacy for EU membership signifies the official initiation of the process, wherein the European Union formally acknowledges and legally establishes Ukraine's European future. This milestone triggers a comprehensive transformation within the country, involving the elevation of living standards, well-being, and legal safeguards for Ukrainians to align with EU norms. Furthermore, achieving candidate status grants Ukraine access to diverse financial resources earmarked for nations preparing to join the EU. This

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[9] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, and the Council Commission opinion on Ukraine's application for membership of the European Union, June 17, 2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0407.

encompasses grants, investments, and technical assistance aimed at facilitating the substantial changes required for EU integration. As Ukraine progresses through reforms, it will increasingly appeal to investors, with EU member states viewing investments in Ukraine as contributions to the overall strengthening and growth of the European Union. The developmental trajectory also entails enhanced cooperation, as Ukraine assumes a role in various EU programmes and initiatives accessible to both EU member states and countries holding candidate status for EU membership.[10]

In addition, the candidate status opens opportunities for financial assistance in transforming society, the legal system, and the economy on the way to EU membership and will keep the country's European integration reforms a priority. Thus, Ukraine will have access to financial assistance for countries preparing to join the EU. Such assistance can be provided through grants, investments, or technical assistance. Candidacy also opens participation in EU programmes and initiatives for Ukraine. Candidate status is the first of three stages in the EU accession process. For Ukraine, it means the first official and formal confirmation of its European integration aspirations and prospects of one day becoming a member of the European Union.

The next stage was the start of formal membership negotiations, which included the adoption of relevant EU legislation; preparation for its implementation; and the implementation of judicial, administrative, economic, and other reforms necessary to meet the requirements (criteria) for a candidate state to join the EU. Membership negotiations began only after a unanimous decision of all 27 member states that the candidate state has completed all interim tasks and is ready to start negotiations within a specific agreed format.

Therefore, the logical conclusion of this thirty-year process should be Ukraine's full membership in the EU. This is the only right decision, first of all, for Europe, because Ukrainians are the only nation that defends European values and the right to be in the European Union with their own blood, but there are still many unresolved issues – it is seven requirements, based on the results of which a decision was made regarding the negotiations: reform of the Constitutional Court; continuation of the judicial reform - the High Council of Justice and the High Qualification Commission of Judges; strengthening the fight against corruption; fight against money laundering; anti-oligarchic reform; adoption of media legislation; completion of the reform of the legislative framework regarding national minorities.

It is also necessary to mention the reform of public administration.

The issue of constitutional consolidation of the irreversibility and practical implementation of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic course, which is particularly relevant because Ukraine acquires the EU candidate status, involves reforming public administration to optimize and accelerate the implementation of this course. It is known that over the past 30 years of its state independence, Ukraine has inherited and largely preserved the system of

[10] European Council, "Ukraine," December 21, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/ukraine.

public administration, the foundations of which were laid back in the days of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic with its flaws of centralization of both state and local authorities. The process of inheriting and preserving such approaches is objective for various reasons and grounds, and primarily due to the involvement in public administration over the years of personnel trained and educated in the paradigm of the planned economy, socialist political and legal system.

The fundamental problems that need to be addressed immediately include, for example, the elimination of parallelism/duplication of management, control and interaction functions in the triangle of state institutions: president, government and parliament. In this context, the auxiliary apparatus of these institutions (offices, secretariats, assistants, advisers) should be deprived of public functions to represent the institutions of power, which they should only help to fulfil their functions. These auxiliary working bodies should be deprived of decisive influence on the adoption of HR policy issues by real (not nominal) heads of government institutions.

The next step is to create a step-by-step schedule for monitoring and revision of the current legislation of the state in order to eliminate duplication of legislative regulation of the same legal relations by different methods and instruments; and to adapt national legislation to the EU legal framework. Also, becomes necessary to triple the role and coordination of civil society institutions in the development of systemic proposals for public authorities, advocacy and official lobbying of such proposals and their implementation. Establish a national grant system for civil society institutions to involve them on a competitive basis in the development (participation in the development) of proposals in the field of public administration and its legislative support[11].

Another important topic is local government.

The inclusion of local self-government in the system of public authorities in the country allows the state authorities to transfer most of the problems to the local level, thus transferring citizens' dissatisfaction with the authorities to the same level. Also, the political ambitions of leaders are formed at the local level, and their active participation in politics begins, because this is the level closest to the population. In addition, citizens who participate in solving local issues and accumulate relevant political experience will be more loyal to the government and the political system. Local self-government has a dual nature of its origin and a dual mission in society. On the one hand, it is the closest government institution to the citizen, and on the other hand, it is a form of self-organisation of citizens that places local self-government among the institutions of civil society. In this sense, from executors of the state order for the provision of relevant services, self-governing units become organisers of the relevant management system that solves problems of local importance through public structures.[12]

[11] Public Administration Reform, https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/reformi/efektivne-vryaduvannya/reforma-derzhavnogo-upravlinnya, n.d.

[12] Oleksandr Batanov, "Municipal reform in Ukraine from the standpoint of the doctrine of modern municipalism," *Journal of Kyiv University of Law* vol. 2/2013, pp. 90-92.

The governments have a key role to play in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, especially in the context of European integration. Local self-government is very important for strategic processes. This is primarily related to the enlargement of the European Union, as well as the recovery from the war. In the context of the country's recovery, everything is based on the decentralization reform and the strengths of local administrations. The challenges faced by local authorities require effective multi-level governance, as well as improved quality of decisions on reconstruction and rebuilding of communities themselves. In this context, the Association of Ukrainian Cities plays an important role as a representative body of local authorities.[13]

Another important part is to strengthen local governments by establishing links and cooperation within various initiatives and programmes. It is necessary to build partnerships between Ukrainian and European municipalities within the framework of various initiatives because each municipality and each community in Ukraine is unique, and recovery and reconstruction should meet their specific needs.[14] At the same time, it is necessary to resolve the issue of the division of powers between local governments and the central government, and the systematic involvement of communities and their associations in the creation of recovery policies. It is also important to determine the policy of urban planning and proportional distribution of funds.

So, seven requirements - should be analysed first - reform of the Constitutional Court, and second - continuation of the judicial reform - the High Council of Justice and the High Qualification Commission of Judges.

Judicial reform and legal education are at the centre of the requirements for EU membership. The most ambitious and comprehensive judicial reform of independent Ukraine began shortly after the Revolution of Dignity in 2016 and received a new impetus in 2021. The goal of the reform is to improve the justice system so that the rule of law is established in practice and judicial proceedings become efficient and fair. First of all, all this is necessary to restore public trust in the judiciary. And, in addition, for the sake of the country's integration into the European Union. In particular, one of the stages of the judicial reform was the completion of the integrity assessment of candidates for the positions of members of the High Council of Justice and the renewal of this body. Also, the High Qualification Commission of Judges resumed its work. The reform of the selection of judges of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine should be mentioned separately.[15]

These are the two main bodies of judicial governance that select judges, submit proposals for their appointment, dismiss them, and bring them to disciplinary responsibility. The main task of the High Qualification Commission of Judges is to select judges. Competitions for the position of judge have not been held in Ukraine for almost four years. During this time, almost two thousand vacant positions have accumulated. This is approximately one in four judicial positions. They need to be filled, as this affects the workload

[13] "Новини | Association of Ukrainian Cities," n.d. https://auc.org.ua/en.
[14] *Ibidem*.
[15] "High Qualification Commission of Judges," n.d. https://vkksu.gov.ua/en.

of judges and the speed of case consideration. Ukraine is currently developing proposals to improve the selection procedure for judges. In particular, they aim to streamline and speed up some stages of the selection process, reduce the duration of mandatory special training for judges, and clarify the rules for checking the integrity of candidates. The selection of new judges and completion of qualification assessment for the current ones will depend on the work of the new composition of the High Qualification Commission of Judges (these stages of the reform are the most time-consuming and it is difficult to predict when they will be implemented).

Third - the fight against corruption.

It is well known that Ukraine has a better anti-corruption infrastructure than many EU members. In particular, a number of anti-corruption bodies have been established, such as: The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine,[16] the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office; the State Bureau of Investigation,[17] and others. At the same time, there are periodic complaints about the work of the above-mentioned anti-corruption agencies. In this context, it should be understood that the creation of a system of preventing and combating corruption is not enough, because the key obstacle to getting rid of corruption in Ukraine is the tolerance of this phenomenon in society. Unfortunately, in today's realities, according to the developers of the anti-corruption strategy, the use of corrupt practices is more convenient, efficient and effective, and sometimes the only way to meet the needs of individuals or legal entities compared to meeting such needs in a legal way.

Strengthening the fight against corruption, as required by the European Commission, also implies reducing the level of corruption in the areas that Ukrainians consider the most corrupt (customs and taxation; courts and law enforcement agencies; construction and land relations; healthcare and social protection). In addition to the above, it is necessary to reduce the regulatory burden on business in order to minimize corruption risks in this area (e.g., abolishing unnecessary reporting, simplifying and enabling the opening of common types of business online).

The experience of EU countries shows that sufficient funding is a prerequisite for the successful operation of anti-corruption agencies. In addition, they must be able to fulfil their obligations. That is why, for example, the Romanian anti-corruption body employs not only investigators and prosecutors, but also economic and financial experts, programmers, etc. Since 2018, the EU Anti-Corruption Initiative (EUACI), the largest EU technical assistance programme for fighting corruption in Ukraine, has been actively operating in Ukraine. The programme consists of three components: strengthening the functional and rule-making capacity of state bodies in the field of preventing and fighting corruption; strengthening parliamentary oversight of the reform process and capacity to scrutinize and improve the

[16] National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, "Main Page | NABU Official Website," n.d., https://nabu.gov.ua/en.
[17] "Ukraine's State Bureau of Investigation," n.d., https://dbr.gov.ua/en/.

strategic legal framework; strengthening the capacity of local governments, civil society organisations and the media to engage in the anti-corruption process.[18]

Fourth, the fight against money laundering.

In order to achieve compliance of Ukraine's legal system in the field of combating money laundering, taking into account the criteria set by the European Union for the states that intend to join, national legislation needs to be amended. Therefore, Ukraine needs to: improve the procedure for financial institutions to identify all their customers, including any persons to whom certain property has been transferred, and to keep proper records; implement adequate systems of control and supervision over the activities of financial institutions; create high-quality legislation to regulate the circulation of virtual assets in Ukraine, taking into account FATF standards, etc.[19] As for the forty FATF recommendations themselves, they are recognized and adopted by many international bodies. The recommendations are not complicated and do not cause difficulties, do not restrict the freedom of legitimate transactions and do not threaten economic development.[20]

Fifth, anti-oligarchic reform.

The anti-oligarchic reform in Ukraine will be implemented in three areas. First of all, this is the sphere of politics. In addition, it is the sphere of mass media. The third area is monopoly influence on the economy. It is in these three areas that certain restrictive measures will be introduced. Thus, in 2021, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky initiated a law on de-oligarchisation to minimize the influence of Ukrainian oligarchs on political, economic and social processes in the country and on the media. According to the law, this is anyone who has three of the four characteristics: participates in politics, has a large influence on the media, controls a monopoly, or has a fortune of more than $80 million. Meanwhile, the Council of Europe has congratulated Ukraine on the adoption of anti-oligarchic legislation. Former Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland called the reform an important step towards fulfilling Ukraine's commitments to Europe.[21]

The recommendations of the Venice Commission were as follows: to move away from a personal approach and focus on the systematic implementation of measures. The bottom line is that many economic and political processes are objectively disrupted because of the war and, accordingly, it is not so easy to implement some things. For example, some declaration registers are closed, many public databases are closed, many people have changed their place of

[18] European Union Anti-Corruption Initiative in Ukraine, "EUACI – European Union Anti-Corruption Initiative," n.d., https://euaci.eu.
[19] "Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures Ukraine," n.d., https://rm.coe.int/moneyval-2020-9-sr-2nd-enhanced-fur-ua/1680a01d6a.
[20] "FATF Public Statement on the Situation in Ukraine," n.d., https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Fatfgeneral/Ukraine-2022.html.
[21] The Law of Ukraine, "On Prevention of Threats to National Security Related to Excessive Influence of Persons with Significant Economic and Political Weight in Public Life (Oligarchs)," n.d., https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1780-20#Text.

residence, some are not in Ukraine, cannot sign any document, do not have access to all data, to their assets. The war creates certain difficulties.[22]

Sixth – adoption of media legislation.

The Ukrainian draft law on media, approved in principle by the parliament, is designed to update the legislation that regulated the industry back in the 1990s. According to the author's idea, it should regulate the activities of television, radio, press, online media, streaming services and platforms of general access to information. After years of fierce debate, the Ukrainian government passed a law on media, which was signed by President Volodymyr Zelensky in 2021. The law establishes new rules for the media market in Ukraine and came into force in April 2023. The Law introduces, in particular, the following concepts that are new to Ukrainian legislation: audio-visual media, multichannel electronic communication network, European production studio, European product, user-generated video, media literacy, media, national product, independent production studio, online media, package of TV and radio channels, video sharing platform, information sharing platform, search engine, conditional access system, universal media service, format. The main fundamental change is the departure from the concept of "mass media", which is considered a relic of the Soviet era, and the transition to the use of the concept of media. A similar situation is with the term "programme", which came from the time of the first TV broadcasts: it has been changed to programme, which corresponds to the English-language equivalent of programme. In particular, it concerns the provisions on the volume of broadcasting in the state language, the number of national and European products, the specifics of applying measures to respond to violations in the media, as well as the specifics and timing of re-registration of print media. A large part of the document is devoted to countering the aggressor state: the National Council will have more powers to influence the media with pro-Russian content, especially in the wartime regime.[23]

The main risks that could hypothetically pose a threat to freedom of speech in Ukraine are the theoretical loss of territories, economic problems, and the restructuring of the media space. Thus, in the World Press Freedom Index, Ukraine moved to 79th position out of 106,[24]and the Ukrainian authorities have ensured the right to freedom of speech in the face of a full-scale invasion, including no military censorship. Ukraine will need to envision new ways to ensure a post-war structure for pluralistic and independent non-online media (including television), including a long-term public broadcaster and an independent national regulator.

The last, seventh - national minorities.

Representatives of more than 100 nations live in Ukraine. Armenians, Germans, Meskhetian Turks, Jews, Romanians, Swedes - Ukraine is home to dozens of different peoples, and each adds colour and richness to the country. Representatives of peoples and national

[22] Venice Commission for Democracy through Law on the law "On the prevention of threats to national security related to the excessive influence of persons with significant economic and political weight in public life (oligarchs)," n.d., https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2023)018-e.

[23] Офіційний вебпортал парламенту України. "Про Медіа," n.d., https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2849-20#Text. (The Law of Ukraine On Mass Media)

[24] "World Press Freedom Index," n.d., https://rsf.org/en/index.

groups are elected on an equal footing to government bodies at all levels, and hold any position in government, enterprises, institutions and organisations.[25]

In examining the advancement of Ukraine's European integration as a potential candidate for European Union accession, the author explores the sluggish progress in enhancing legislation concerning national minorities. The focus lies on the numerous shortcomings within the existing legal framework, which falls short of aligning with the highest European standards. Specifically, drawing from assessments by experts from the Venice Commission, the author underscores that Ukraine's current laws on national minorities lack clarity in facilitating the complete expression of linguistic identity. The regulations in place do not offer a clear framework for the full realization of linguistic identity for national minorities, as the pertinent provisions are dispersed across various legislative texts and primarily address language use in specific domains such as education, judiciary, media, and the like.[26]

In July 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a draft law on the rights of national minorities (communities) in certain areas. The document will be sent to the Verkhovna Rada for consideration. The purpose of the draft law is to harmonize Ukrainian legislation with the EU norms on the realization of the rights of national minorities. Among other legislative initiatives, the changes will affect educational legislation. In particular, it is proposed to guarantee the right to use the language of the respective national minority in the educational process in classes (groups) with languages of instruction of national minorities whose languages are official languages of the EU. The list of subjects that members of national minorities are required to study in the state language includes the Ukrainian language and literature, history of Ukraine, and defence of Ukraine. Private higher education institutions of Ukraine will have the right to freely choose the language of instruction, which is an official language of the European Union, while ensuring that students studying in such institutions study the state language as a separate academic discipline. The rule that representatives of other national minorities will receive basic and specialized secondary education in the state language in the amount of at least 80% of the annual amount of study time will remain in force. Educational institutions will have the right to expand the list of subjects to be taught in Ukrainian, for example, at the request of parents or students. Updating Ukraine's national legislation on national minorities is currently an important step for the state on the long and difficult path of European integration.[27]

So, as can be seen, Ukraine has fulfilled the seven recommendations of the European Commission as quickly as possible to start formal negotiations on membership in the European Union. The law on the selection of judges of the Constitutional Court was adopted and the implementation of the law on the selection of judges of the Constitutional Court, which is in

[25] Olesya Yaremchuk, *Our Others: Stories of Ukrainian Diversity (Ukrainian Voices)*, Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2021, p. 16.

[26] Venice Commission for Democracy through Law, "On the law 'On national minorities (communities) of Ukraine'," Venice Commission for Democracy through Law, n.d., https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2023)019-e.

[27] "Про Національні Меншини (Спільноти) України" (Law of Ukraine "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine"), Офіційний вебпортал парламенту України, 2024, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2827-20#Text.

line with the conclusions of the Venice Commission, was launched; the process of updating the entire judicial system of Ukraine was launched and the law on the restoration of electronic declarations of officials and their verification during martial law was adopted; the State Anti-Corruption Programme was approved and Ukrainian legislation was ensured to meet the requirements of the FATF; antitrust legislation was adopted (work was done to protect society and the state from abuses inspired by oligarchs. Ukrainian media legislation was also harmonized with EU standards. In addition, Ukraine's actions in the context of strengthening the protection of the rights of national communities were outlined and relevant legislative changes were adopted, including the law on national minorities, and a clear vision of the next steps in the educational sphere was developed. All this opens up new and broader opportunities for national communities and ensures compliance with the highest international standards in this area.

That is why on October 31, the European Commission submitted a report assessing Ukraine's successes. The European Commission sees Ukraine's progress. This is a significant success in the conditions of a full-scale war unleashed by Russia. The fulfilled conditions relate to the judicial reform and the mass media law - Kyiv is successfully progressing along the path of implementing these recommendations. "Ukraine is carrying out far-reaching reforms. But an even stronger fight against corruption, new laws on lobbying activities and stricter regulations on asset declarations are indispensable measures. Based on these reports, the European heads of state and government then want to decide on the possible start of EU accession negotiations in December" - said the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.[28]

In November 2023 the European Commission presented the Enlargement Package on the progress of the ten countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans, in which the key conclusions are also laid out regarding the movement of Ukraine towards the acquisition of membership in the European Union. The report talks about the main achievements of Ukraine and outlined steps that are still worth working on. However, in the main higher executive body of the European Union, it was recommended that EU leaders start accession negotiations with Ukraine.

Exactly on November 8, the European Commission recommended the EU Council start accession negotiations with Ukraine. Ursula von der Leyen noted that the European Commission welcomes Ukraine's efforts to continue the reforms that must be completed. In connection with this, together with the recommendation on the start of negotiations, the European Commission recommended to the European Council to create framework conditions for such negotiations, which would provide for the implementation of all necessary reforms by Ukraine. The report on the achieved progress will be published by the European Commission in March 2024. "In the 10 years since the Maidan, the country continues to face enormous

[28] LB.ua, "Головне За Середу, 8 Листопада: Оборона Авдіївки, Продовження Воєнного Стану Та Мобілізації, Рекомендації Єврокомісії." *LB.ua,* November 9, 2023, https://lb.ua/society/2023/11/08/583458_golovne_seredu_8_listopada.html. (The main thing for Wednesday, November 8: defence of Avdiyivka, continuation of martial law and mobilization, recommendations of the European Commission).

difficulties and tragedy provoked by Russia's aggressive war. But Ukrainians are reforming their country even as they fight in a war that is of existential importance to them. The main progress has been made in the field of constitutional justice, in the election of the Supreme Council of Justice. Ukraine managed to limit the influence of oligarchs on public life, adopt a new law on media and achieve progress in the issue of national minorities. Based on this, we recommended the European Council to start negotiations with Ukraine" - the president of the European Commission emphasized.[29]

So, summing up everything above, the European Commission believes that Ukraine still needs to finalize three of the seven blocks of recommendations. They concern the fight against corruption, the rights of national minorities, and the creation of a legal framework for de-oligarchisation. In particular, it is about the adoption of laws on increasing the number of employees of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, about lobbying by European standards. The European Commission hopes that Ukraine will take into account the additional recommendations of the Venice Commission to the law on national minorities in the part related to education and language.

Before the new European Commission report, which will be published in March 2024, Ukraine must deal with those recommendations that have not been implemented. It is also important that the European Union is currently going through a period of internal reforms and institutional renewal. Discussions are ongoing on how the accession of new members should take place, and how these reforms may affect the enlargement process. And the speed of negotiations will also depend on this. However, Russia's war against Ukraine has changed a lot. Russian aggression forced the European Union to look differently at its role on the continent, at the process of expansion and at the expediency of steps that would protect it from destructive external encroachments. Even today, the EU realizes that the policy of enlargement is not just the spread of EU principles, but also the protection of democratic values against which Russia is waging a war. We are all witnessing a new momentum in the enlargement policy. The EU is currently at the stage of intensive consideration of its place, its role, and Ukraine occupies one of the central places in these discussions.

Generally, Ukrainians widely endorse the idea of joining the European Union, a sentiment that has gained significant momentum since the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. Various sociological groups' data indicates a remarkable surge in support from 68% to 86% in the initial days of the invasion (starting from February 24). This upward trend continued, reaching an unprecedented level of 91% by the end of March 2022, marking the highest level recorded in all years of research. Furthermore, a majority (56%) expresses confidence that Ukraine will secure EU membership within one or two years, while 23% anticipate this to happen within five years.[30]

[29] Ukrinform, "Єврокомісія Рекомендувала Розпочати Переговори Про Вступ України Та Молдови," November 8, 2023, https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3784241-evrokomisia-rekomenduvala-rozpocati-peregovori-pro-vstup-ukraini-ta-moldovi.html. (The European Commission recommended starting negotiations on the accession of Ukraine and Moldova).
[30] Reuters, "Record number of Ukrainians support joining EU, backing for NATO membership falls – poll," April 5, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/record-number-ukrainians-support-joining-eu-backing-nato-membership-falls-poll-2022-04-05/.

The European scenario reflects a similar positive inclination, with Portugal leading in support for Ukraine's accession at 87%, closely followed by Estonia (83%), Lithuania (82%), Poland (81%), and Ireland (79%). Italy (71%), Germany (68%), and France (62%) also show substantial support. Notably, Hungarians exhibit the highest degree of scepticism, with only 48% of respondents endorsing the idea of Ukraine's accession to the EU.[31]

Finally, in conclusion, this article undertakes an analysis of the dynamic process Ukraine is going through on its way to EU membership. Prior to Russia's invasion, Ukraine was working with its EU partners toward rapprochement. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and imperfect reforms in the Ukrainian system, real political solutions for accession were lacking. The full-scale Russian offensive in 2022 dramatically changed the situation - both the lives of Ukrainians and the positions of European leaders. Brussels has made it a condition that Kiev finalize judicial reform and implement laws on oligarchs, media, and national minorities. In the context of Ukraine's future in the European Union, it is apparent that a profound change has been made in the attitudes of European leaders and the public toward Ukraine's potential membership. Thus, taking into account the conditions set by the European Union, the analysis is focused on the fact that there are benefits and challenges awaiting Ukraine, and there are social and political changes resulting from this dynamic process - full-fledged membership in the European Union.

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Second Cold War and the Potential of Russia

Avraham Cohen

Abstract. This study evaluates economic capabilities of the Soviet Union and of Russia in comparison to the advanced, High-Income economies. The First Cold War ended in the late 1980s, resulting in the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Persistent failure to reach economic objectives, and the continuous stress on the economy due to technological, military and propaganda competition were the dominant factors of the Soviet failure during the First Cold War. Hence, evaluating economic capabilities of Russia can provide important foresight regarding its prospects of success in the Second Cold War. I apply the concept of economic potential, which is a recently developed quantitative index. I am utilizing Soft Regression modelling tool (based on Fuzzy Information Processing). In order to take advantage of all quantitative data available for variables relevant to our modelling, I apply ranges of values instead of single measurements. The study consists of a cross-national economic model for years: 1960, 1965, 1970, 1978, 1985, 1992, 2000, 2007, 2014 and 2018, involving data from over 120-160 countries.
Summary of the results: Economic Potential of the Soviet Union was low in comparison to the advanced High-Income economies throughout the period of 1960 – 1992, which explains the inability of the Soviet economic system to withstand the stress of the First Cold War. Economic Potential of Russia has not been as high (in comparison to the Advanced Western Economies), as that of the Soviet Union and has not improved much throughout 2000 – 2018.

Keywords: Russia, USSR, economic potential, war in Ukraine, economic potential

Introduction

Following WWII, the Soviet Union emerged as a strong military, economic and technological power. The government of the Soviet Union pursued expansionist policy aiming to increase its spheres of influence by installing friendly/subservient governments in any country where conditions were appropriate. The United States and the Western alliance responded by the policy of containment (Truman Doctrine). The policy consisted of military deterrence, regional warfare by proxies as well as economic and technological competition, etc. By the end of 1980s, the Soviet-led alliance began to break-up, mostly due to persistent failure to reach economic objectives and to attain standard of living/quality of life comparable to the advanced Western countries.

Since the early 2000, the officially stated aim of the Russian Government has been to reverse the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and to restore Russia's geo-political status to the level of the Soviet Union at the peak of its power. This has led to Western countermeasures, and now an increasing number of professionals refer to the present political confrontation as a Second Cold War.

The objective of the present study is to evaluate perspectives of Russia to achieve its goals as stated above. I address the economic and technological potential of Russia in comparison to that of the Soviet Union and evaluate the performance of both vs High-Income Advanced Western economies. In addition, I compare the performance of Russia to East

European countries which during the First Cold War were either allies of the Soviet Union, or component republics of the Soviet Union. I divided East-European countries into 3 groups due to differences in history and present political orientation:

Group 1 consists of countries which used to be members of former communist political and economic alliance: Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. During the First Cold War, these countries had highly centralized economic systems. In addition, a substantial proportion of their international trade took place within the bloc and was dominated by government-to-government decisions. As a consequence, the countries within the group had a low degree of international competitiveness in the global markets. Following the collapse of the Soviet-led bloc, East-European economies undertook the process of transformation into less centralized, market-oriented economies, and integration into European and global economic systems.

Group 2 consists of Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. These three countries were part of the Soviet Union and gained independence following the disintegration of the Soviet empire. Their economies were a small component of a large, highly centralized Soviet economy. Following the disintegration, these countries experienced severe economic crisis, due to the break-down of the centralized soviet system, while lacking their own links to external, global economy. Similarly to the East-European countries, the Baltic economies rapidly moved to reform their economies into market-oriented systems integrated within European and global markets.

Group 3 consists of Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. These countries were also components of the Soviet Union and became independent following its disintegration. However, in contrast to the countries in group 1 and 2, the countries in the group 3 remained under the strong influence of Russia and did not attempt to integrate into European economic system, but instead retained strong economic, political, and military ties to Russia (Ukraine until 2014).

In general, researchers are utilizing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita or Gross National Income - GNI (previously known as Gross National Product – GNP) per capita as the most popular measurements of economic performance. However, there are well known deficiencies in various measures of national income (such as GDP, GNI and GNP), all of them are well known measurements of the value of economic activity. For convenience, from now on, I refer to all of them as GDP. All these are aggregate measurements and have several built-in deficiencies, greatly affecting their reliability. The measurement problems of GDP led us to use alternative, more reliable measurement tool for economic performance, which is more reliable and more difficult to manipulate. In the present study I utilize the concept of "potential", which is based on the performance of explanatory variables that reflect the performance of the countries. Some of those variables are difficult to manipulate on a large scale: for example, exports of one country are imports to other countries, and thus the measurements are not solely in the hands of one measuring authority, etc. The concept of "potential", based on the values of explanatory variables has been introduced in recent years

and appears in economic potential[1] and financial potential.[2] In the present study I compute economic potential as well as technological potential of the countries under study. Due to lack of relevant data, technological potential can be only from year 2000.

In order to compute economic or technological potential, based on the explanatory variables, the following steps are needed:

Constructing cross-national model (utilizing as many countries as possible, and as much information as possible) in order to compute relative importance of the explanatory variables. In other words, relative importance of explanatory variables is determined not based merely on the countries under the specific study, but by world-wide model.

Once I compute relative importance of each explanatory variable, then I can compute economic or technological potential of each individual country. By observing the behaviour of economic or technological potential of any given country over the years, I get accurate indication of the trend of its long-term performance (in comparison to the leading group of successful, High-Income countries). I must add that country's potential (relatively to the other countries) is not expected to change substantially from one year to the next. This is the reason I applied data for years: 1960, 1965, 1970, 1978, 1985, 1992, 2000, 2007, 2014, 2018. In other words, I utilized data every 5-8 years, plus the last year before the pandemic.

A more detailed explanation regarding the computation of Technology or Economic Potential is presented below.

The reliance on economic potential as measurement of economic success critically depends on the accurate computation of relative importance of the explanatory variables. Here I must note that the traditional Multi-Variate Regression (MVR) methods are not expected to generate reliable relative importance of explanatory variables [3], [4]. I selected to utilize "Soft Regression" (SR) as the modelling method for this study. SR is an Artificial Intelligence tool (more specifically it is a Soft Computing tool), based on fuzzy information processing.[3] Comparison of SR to Multivariate Regression (MVR) appears in Yosef et. al.[4] The study illustrates numerous advantages of SR versus MVR. Reliability of computing relative importance of explanatory variables (RELIMP) is analysed in Shnaider[5] and Yosef.[6] The studies demonstrate that commonly practiced computation of RELIMP using traditional MVR is unreliable and inconsistent, in contrast to the SR which generates reliable and consistent

[1] Arthur Yosef, Moti Schneider, Eli Shnaider, "Data Mining Method for Identifying Biased or Misleading Future Outlook," *International Journal of Information Technology & Decision Making* vol. 21, no. 1/September 22, 2021, pp. 109–41, https://doi.org/10.1142/s0219622021500516.

[2] Arthur Yosef, Eli Shnaider, Rimona Palas, and Amos Baranes, "Decision Support System Based on Fuzzy Logic for Assessment of Expected Corporate Income Performance," *International Journal of Computational Intelligence and Applications* vol. 20, no. 2/May 19, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1142/s1469026821500097.

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[4] Arthur Yosef, Eli Shnaider, N. Haruvy, "Soft Regression vs. Linear Regression," *Pioneer Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* vol. 10, no. 1-2/2015, pp. 31-46.

[5] Eli Shnaider, Arthur Yosef, "Relative Importance of Explanatory Variables: Traditional Method versus Soft Regression," *International Journal of Intelligent Systems* vol. 33, no. 6/March 8, 2018, pp. 1180–96, https://doi.org/10.1002/int.21975.

[6] *Idem*, "On Measuring the Relative Importance of Explanatory Variables in a Soft Regression Method," *Advances and Applications in Statistics* vol. 50, no. 3/2015, pp. 201-228.

results. A more detailed discussion regarding the SR method is provided below – in particular the issues and terms that are necessary for understanding the results and implications of this study.

Method

Modelling Tool

As stated above, I utilize SR as our modelling tool due to its major advantages in comparison to the traditional MVR methods. First, I briefly describe some important deficiencies of (the traditional statistical modelling) MVR methods:

Ever since the introduction of computerized methods, the modelling in economics, management, finance, marketing, etc. has been mostly based on econometric tools (various statistical techniques, some extremely complex and considered highly sophisticated). However, in parallel to substantial achievements attained with the help of econometric tools, the practitioners of modelling in those fields are well aware of enormous difficulties and profound failures in numerous modelling projects. Even in "successful" and "workable" models developed with the help of econometric tools, very often-human intervention (use of "Add Factors") is essential to avoid outright failure.

MVR requires precise and complete model specification in order to generate reliable results. When model is incomplete, or when its functional form is incorrect, this leads to a misspecification bias: distorted and unreliable results. However, from the practical standpoint one should ask, whether under severe conditions of uncertainty, do we always know all the relevant variables? Moreover, even if we know, do we always have data for all of them? Do we know the exact functional form of how the variables interact? In numerous decision-making or decision supporting systems and in countless events where decision makers must make fateful decisions, they would answer negatively to these questions.

Soft Regression is a modelling tool based on Fuzzy Logic. It is a modelling tool which does not require restrictive conditions. It is not designed to generate precise mathematical function characterized by a small random deviation. However, it is capable to correctly identify the relevant factors for the model, correctly identify whether relation is direct or inverse, and in addition, its greatest advantage is its capability to reliably compute the relative importance of various explanatory variables included in the model even when the model is partial and incomplete (in such cases MVR models generate distorted and unreliable results by definition since it requires precise and complete model specification). The ratio of relative importance values among explanatory variables included in various specifications remains the same (when using SR), no matter if I add or remove explanatory variables. This is in contrast to MLR, where changing specification also changes (in some cases even drastically) the ratio between relative importance values of explanatory variables.

I will briefly list several of the important features of the SR that constitute a major advantage in comparison to the MVR, in particular when constructing a model characterized by highly interrelated explanatory variables.

SR does not require precise model specification. This regression tool is based on Fuzzy Logic, which is designed in the first place to handle information under severe conditions of uncertainty and imprecision. The idea here is to give up on the possibility of building a precise model and satisfying ourselves with the opportunity to work with whatever data are available. I generate a partial/less-precise model and expect it to be very reliable in a general direction of its conclusions because it avoids the problem of misspecification bias. It allows the use of partial and unreliable data to make reliable but broad (not precise) conclusions in comparison to misspecified MVR model based on these data. Of course, in the case of partial data (some potentially important variables excluded due to lack of data), the MVR model is misspecified by definition and subject to misspecification bias. Soft regression calculates reliable weights (relative importance) of the explanatory variables, in contrast to the traditional regression tools, where calculated relative weights are unreliable.[78]

The significance of the explanatory variables and the relative importance of those variables among themselves are not affected by adding additional variables to the model or removing some variables from it (in contrast to MVR). When a partial model is constructed, the significance of the explanatory variables and the ratio between relative importance values of those variables among themselves are not affected by adding additional variables to the model or removing some variables from it. This is in contrast to the behaviour of MLR, where addition or removal of an explanatory variable can change drastically the significance of other explanatory variables of the model. This characteristic of the SR adds an important feature of stability and confidence to the decision making.

Explanatory variables are not required to be independent of each other. In the fields such as Economics, Finance, Political Science etc. the variables are usually intangible concepts, that are often highly correlated among themselves mathematically even while logically they could each represent separate and independent (at least to some extent) concepts. When using MVR, high correlation among explanatory variables causes some of the important explanatory variables to appear as insignificant, and therefore being removed from the model - thus leading to model misspecification. In SR, the modelling process and the results are not affected by multicollinearity. Hence, this feature of SR (not requiring independence of explanatory variables) constitutes a major advantage in comparison to MVR, in particular if explanatory variables are highly correlated.

I introduce the heuristically determined Low-cut and High-cut (for minimum and maximum values of membership function – further explanations appear below). Membership function is designed to determine, to what extent each value of the processed data is a member in predefined fuzzy set.[9] This brings the membership function utilized in SR more in line with "human thinking" and thus allowing the modeler to monitor the logic of the information processing throughout the analysis. This feature of the SR helps to handle the distortions due to outlying values in a user-based logical approach (in contrast to strictly mathematical method utilized in Robust Regression approach).

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[7] Shnaider, Yosef, "Relative Importance."
[8] *Idem*, "On measuring the relative importance."
[9] Zadeh, *art. cit.*

There are no technical issues that could cause model distortions. Wrong results are only possible if the model specification contradicts human reasoning and common sense, or if the membership functions used during the data normalization are illogical. As long as logical integrity during the model construction is maintained – the model will be reliable. This means: no unrealistic assumptions (which contradict real world conditions) are allowed. The normalizing process must be transparent, and in line with common sense.

Data preparation

I utilized cross-national data obtained mostly from the World Bank data base. Due to changes in methodology and definitions of variables and due to changes in baselines, I downloaded data at different time periods, and each time got different data series (different values). I downloaded the variables over several years. I also utilized data from hard copy publications of the World Bank before 1995. I excluded from the study all the countries having small populations (half a million or less) because small (by population) countries are characterized by different features (such as less diverse and small domestic market, etc.), in comparison to larger countries. Additional countries such as Taiwan and North Korea were excluded due to missing data. The total of over 150 countries were included for the years: 1992, 2000, 2007, 2014 and 2018. Over 120 countries were included for years 1960, 1965, 1970, 1978 and 1985. I supplemented missing data for individual countries (where it was possible) from adjacent years (this procedure has also been used in the World Bank hard copy publications). The above-mentioned data supplementing procedure is reasonable for the cross-section analysis of variables, usually characterized by relatively small percentage annual changes, and in the context of the inherent imprecision of the data in the first place.

The data preparation involves several stages addressing outliers as carefully as possible, without deleting records (countries) from the data matrix (will be explained below). The process also allows to identify records (countries) where data appear to be severely unreliable and inconsistent. In such cases, these countries are deleted from the analysis of that specific year. There were very few countries that were deleted from the analysis for any given year due to extreme inconsistency of data. This, of course, had very little influence on the results of a general model where the data for over 120 -150 countries were used.

One of the most important rules in Data Science is: every piece of information is important and should be included in the analysis (unless there is a convincing reason to believe that the data are severely distorted and misleading). For numerous factors, there are more than one way to measure them. For example, the measurements of aggregate economic activity, such as GDP per capita, or GNI per capita (or in previous years – GNP per capita), could be considered as good measurements of a long-term economic performance. Those are very common and widely used measurements. However, I already mentioned three different methods of measurement (GDP, GNI, and GNP). Which among the three is the most appropriate? Since I am utilizing cross-national data, and since all the values are presented in U.S. dollars, there are additional differences among various data series due to currency conversion methods or due to different baselines. For example, there are data in current U.S. dollars (USD), as well as data in constant 1990 USD, in constant 1995 USD, in constant 2000

USD, in constant 2005 USD and in constant 2010, etc. There are data series based on regular currency conversion method vs. PPP (purchasing power parity) conversion method. Also, since I downloaded data from the World Bank in different years, for some data series there were differences in measurement methodology. Despite the fact that all these measurements are (from our perspective) measuring essentially the same thing (economic performance), there are very substantial differences among various data series in terms of values, and even in their scale. Thus, just for the year 1992, I came up with 21 different data series representing our dependent variable (GDP per capita). If I assume only one explanatory variable (Exports per capita), I find a similar measurement issue: there are 12 Exports per capita data series for the same year. Therefore, if I would use MVR, just to test our model for the year 1992, it would be necessary to perform over 250 regression runs if I want to utilize all the data available to us (assuming model with just one explanatory variable - Exports). And what if I have more explanatory variables and decide to test the model for more than one year (in order to have a higher degree of confidence in results)? The problem is not only the amount of work, but also the question of how to summarize so many results and to reach meaningful conclusion? It would require hundreds or even thousands of regressions runs, which in turn had to be summarized and interpreted, and could open the possibility of inconsistencies, when there are so many results.

In most cases, modelers do not use all the possible data series, but rather select one or several such series. The question is: which of the various data series to select? Most modelers either select the most popular and easiest to obtain variables. In some other cases the decision is based upon the availability of data, amount of missing observations, etc. The less legitimate approach is to try several different variables, and then select the ones generating results that best serve modelers' goals (without mentioning other results). Of course, there is always a possibility of criticism: why a given selection among the data series was made, and not another. The method utilized in this study precludes such criticism, since all the data series are utilized.

Advantages of utilizing intervals

In this study I utilize quantitative modelling method capable of using ranges (intervals) of values that are derived from all the available data series. There are several important advantages of transforming available data into intervals of values:

The very basic principle in the field of Information Systems is all available data are valuable (unless suspected of being severely distorted) and should be utilized in the modelling process.

Confidence in the modelling results: when the approach is inclusive and involves all the available data series, then obviously the confidence in results is greater vs. modelling process involving selected data series while ignoring others.

Efficient handling of missing observations: This issue arises when in many data series there is a large number of missing measurements. For example, in our study, I utilized data from over 150 countries, but in many data series (numerical vectors), I encountered a problem of missing data for dozens of countries. In addition, the set of missing countries was not the same in different data series. However, I can construct intervals for every country, for which

there is at least one measurement. Of course, in some intervals there will be more data points and in others less, but I can include all these countries in the modelling process, and thus increase our confidence in the results.

It is much easier to reach meaningful and unambiguous conclusions due to the drastic reduction of the amount of regression runs. When using the method presented here, the amount of regression runs drops to 4:

Regression using only Minimum values

Regression using only Maximum values

Regression of Minimum for dependent variable vs. Maximum of explanatory variables

Regression of Maximum for dependent variable vs. Minimum of explanatory variables

Note: it does not matter how many explanatory variables are expressed in terms of intervals, the method will still require only four regression runs.

The four regression runs generate four results, which again can be reduced to an interval between the minimum and the maximum value of the results, and this interval can be used to draw conclusions as well as for further computations.

In the case where (unlike in our study) the dependent variable is a regular single numerical vector, and only some of the explanatory variables appear as intervals, then the amount of regression runs drops to two:

I. Regression of dependent variable vs. Minimum of explanatory variables

II. Regression of dependent variable vs. Maximum of explanatory variables

Similarly, in the case when only the dependent variable is expressed as interval, and explanatory variables are ordinary numerical vectors, there will be only two regression runs:

I. Regression of Minimum for dependent variable vs. explanatory variables

II. Regression of Maximum for dependent variable vs. explanatory variables

The process of Range Reduction:

When many data series represent a given variable, I can identify (in approximate terms) the centre of gravity of that variable (for each record), and thus ignore extreme outlying measurements (as explained below).

For that purpose, I apply Range Reduction Algorithm (RRA) (see detailed explanation in [10] and [11]). The main objective is to extract as much as possible information out of available data, while eliminating potential outliers, which from our perspective are measurements that represent distorted, mistaken, misleading, etc. data points.

In some cases, the entire data series are distorted (or are inappropriate as being proxy variables in a specific model). Problem of this type appears when there is a problematic measurement methodology applied throughout the numerical vector, causing it to be way out

[10] Arthur Yosef and Eli Shnaider, "Modeling Technique Based on the Ranges of Values: Implementation Using Conventional Regression Method," *Computational Economics* vol. 55, no. 1/March 27, 2019, pp. 211–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10614-019-09889-9.

[11] *Idem*, "Utilizing Intervals of Values in Modelling due to Diversity of Measurements," *Fuzzy Economic Review*, International Association for Fuzzy-set Management and Economy (SIGEF), vol. 23, no. 2/2018, pp. 3-26.

of line in comparison to other measurement methodologies of additional numerical vectors representing the same factor. When there are many data, series representing the same factor (either dependent or explanatory), then by combining all the data of those data series into intervals of values, the distorted data series will appear on the edges of such intervals and could be handled effectively by the RRA.

In addition to the problem of the whole data series being inappropriate, I also address the reliability of specific records of the data series (countries), where some records could be reliable and some not. This problem can also be mitigated by applying RRA (see [12] and [13]). By reducing an interval, I am bringing it closer to its core area that reflects the centre of gravity of the interval. Such core (centre of gravity) area effectively represents most of the information regarding that factor (measured in different ways by different proxy variables). The outliers on the edges of intervals are deleted without much danger of losing important information.

When the decision is made to utilize several data series to represent the same factor, each data record (in our case country) will be represented by a range of values: the minimum and the maximum. However, before converting each record into the range between its minimum and maximum value, all the data series representing that specific variable, must be recalculated in order to bring all of them into the same scale, otherwise the combining of data series, each measured indifferent ways and scales, is meaningless. In general, bringing all the different numerical vectors into the same scale is possible by recalculating all of them based on the same reference point. Selected reference point should be reasonable and reliable. When utilizing a method based on Fuzzy Set Theory (such as Soft Regression), then defining all the numerical vectors in terms of membership in the same fuzzy set is an additional (and very effective) way to address the scale problem and allow application of RRA. The normalization process based on the Fuzzy Set Theory is presented below:

Normalizing Procedure and Applying RRA:

SR is a modelling tool based on Fuzzy Logic and Fuzzy Set Theory. I start the data preparation process by defining a fuzzy set of High-Income Economies. I consider this set (High Income Economies) as a fuzzy set, because it is a group (set) of countries, where the boundary of the set is unknown. The Fuzzy Set Theory divides the data domain into three parts: (1) data elements that definitely and fully belong to the set, (2) Data elements that partially (to some degree) belong to the set, and (3) data elements that definitely do not belong to the set. The members of the fuzzy set will be assigned value of 1, those who definitely do not belong to the fuzzy set will be assigned the value of 0, and partial members of the fuzzy set will be assigned values between 0 and 1, proportionally. Based on these definitions, I proceed to normalize data as follows:

I normalize data by introducing the heuristically determined maximum and minimum thresholds. Data normalizing requires projection of the values from every numerical vector into equivalent normalized numerical vector having values between zero and one, based on

[12] *Idem*, "Modelling Technique Based on the Ranges of Values," pp. 211–30.
[13] *Idem*, "Utilizing Intervals of Values," pp. 3-26.

predefined function which is expected logically to reflect common sense in projecting such values, while maintaining the integrity of the data. In our study, I define a fuzzy set "High Income Economies", representing the most successfully performing economies. The normalizing process is expected to determine which countries are definitely members of this fuzzy set (and are assigned value of 1), which countries belong to the fuzzy set only to some degree (values above 0 and below 1) and countries that are definitely not members of this fuzzy set (assigned value of 0).

The first step in the normalizing process is to define max_l as the value in a given vector such that all elements equal to or greater than $max_l$are assigned the value of one. I selected "Average of High-Income Economies" as our $max_l$for the dependent variable as well as for all the explanatory variables. Such average values appear in the data bases and hard copy publications of the World Bank for all variables. By turning all the numbers above max_linto 1, I neutralize the negative effect of the outliers having excessively high values without deleting these data points.

Next stage is to identify data elements which are definitely not members of the fuzzy set. I decided that a group of countries categorized as "Low Income Economies" are definitely not members of the High-Income set. I define min_l as the value in that vector such that all elements equal to or smaller than $min_l$are assigned value of zero, which means they definitely do not belong to the category of "High Income Countries". I selected "Average of Low-Income Economies" as our min_l for the dependent variable as well as for all the explanatory variables. Such average values also appear in the data bases and hard copy publications of the World Bank for all variables.

I emphasize again: max_j and min_jmust be determined based on logic and common sense for each domain (for every variable), so as not to distort the data.

For all other elements (between max_jandmin_j) I project all othervector elements into the interval □0,1□ proportionally. Thus max_j and $min_j$are Maximum and Minimum thresholds.

Note: in the cases of several numerical vectors which essentially represent the same variable, data normalizing procedure explained above brings all these vectors into the same scale, thus helping to express all of them in terms of undistorted intervals (ranges) of values.

In Mathematical Form, the Function Used for Normalization is:

Let's assume that I have c numerical vectors, each consisting of n elements. I use these numerical vectors to construct a matrix: $A^{raw} = \left(x_{k,l}^{raw}\right)_{n\times c}$ where n is a number of rows and c is a number of columns. I normalize all the numerical vectors by applying relevant membership function, such that the resulting elements of the numerical vectors will consist of values [0,1], which represent degree of membership in the same fuzzy set, i.e., a fuzzy matrix of A^{raw} is a matrix:

$$A = \left(x_{k,l}\right)_{n\times c} \quad (1)$$

where $x_{k,l} = \mu_l\left(x_{k,l}^{raw}\right)$ for all $k = 1,2,\dots,n$ and μ_l is a membership function for all $l = 1,2,\dots,c$.

and

$$x_{k,l} = \mu_l\left(x_{k,l}^{raw}\right) = \begin{cases} 0 & , x_{k,l}^{raw} \le min_l \\ \frac{x_{k,l}^{raw} - min_l}{max_l - min_l} & , min_l < x_{k,l}^{raw} < max_l \\ 1 & , max_l \le x_{k,l}^{raw} \end{cases} \qquad (2)$$

where$A^{raw} = \left(x_{k,l}^{raw}\right)_{n\times c}$ is a matrix of original raw data (before normalization), and min_l, max_l are the Minimum and Maximum thresholds as explained above.

Another important issue to consider when constructing intervals is the potential presence of outliers and their implications. The outliers that are expected to appear in various data series can substantially widen the intervals to a degree that is detrimental for successful modelling. The cut-off points applied in membership functions by their nature tend to alleviate, at least to some extent, the problem of outliers. In other words, when different measurements are full members of the fuzzy set, they are all assigned the value of 1, no matter how much their original values differ. The same holds for measurements that are definitely not members of the fuzzy set – all of them are assigned the value of 0, no matter how much their original values differ.

Once all the values of the matrix are converted into the grades of membership, then I can sort values in each row from the smallest to the largest since now they are all members of the same fuzzy set. This way, for every row (for every record, representing in our study a country), I construct intervals consisting of grades of membership.

Note: Following this stage, the new matrix loses its original structure by its initial vectors. Now I have a matrix, such that in each row, the first element on the left side is the minimum value for that row, the next one is the second smallest value and so on until I reach the last value on the right side, which is the maximum for that row.

I utilize the Range Reduction Algorithm (RRA), which is explained in detail in [14] and [15]. RRA is applied to reduce the range of intervals by deleting outliers. RRA also identifies cases where interval reduction is not working, and the length of the interval is such, as to seriously question the reliability of the data in that record. In such cases the data for that specific record (country) are deleted.

Soft Regression- Basic Terms

Similarity: Denoted S_{Y,X_j} and ranges between 0 and 1. In the Soft Regression method, I utilize the measure of similarity which indicates the degree to which explanatory variable (X_j) behaves in a similar pattern, whether direct or inverse, in comparison to dependent variable (Y). Therefore, the measure of similarityS_{Y,X_j} is an equivalent to the statistical measures of significance (t-tests or sig.). Significant relation is found with similarity levels of$S_{Y,X_j} \ge 0.8$.

[14] *Idem*, "Modelling Technique Based on the Ranges of Values," pp. 211–30.
[15] *Idem*, "Utilizing Intervals of Values," pp. 3-26.

However, in addition to fully significant relation, there is an option of partial significance$0.7 < S_{Y,X_j} < 0.8$, so that as $S_{Y,X_j}$is approaching closer to 0.7, it is closer to insignificance (see [3]). When the similarity measure is below 0.7, the explanatory variable is insignificant. The gradual transition from being fully significant to being fully insignificant provides additional stability to the modeling process while utilizing SR.

Combined Similarity of all explanatory variables to the dependent variable: Denoted $S^{Comb}_{Y,X_1,\dots,X_n}$ and ranges between 0 and 1. Once similarity measures are computed for all the explanatory variables ($\{X_j\}_{j=1}^{n}$), the next step is to calculate collective contribution of all the explanatory variables combined in explaining the behaviour of dependent variable (Y). This measure is denoted $S^{Comb}_{Y,X_1,\dots,X_n}$. It reflects, to what degree all the explanatory variables combined, explain the behavior of the dependent variable, which is equivalent to R^2 adjusted, used in the conventional regression methods. One important difference between the two measurement methods is that by using $S^{Comb}_{Y,X_1,\dots,X_n}$ I allow for overlap of explanatory variables in their relations with the dependent variable (which is of course more reasonable and more in line with the "real world" behaviour), and therefore explanatory variables are not required to be independent of each other.

Relative Importance of explanatory variables: Denoted RELIMP. The way to compute relative importance of the explanatory variables ($\{X_j\}_{j=1}^{n}$) is to find out how much each of them contributes to the $S^{Comb}_{Y,X_1,\dots,X_n}$. To compute Adjusted RELIMP I divide the RELIMP of each explanatory variable by $S^{Comb}_{Y,X_1,\dots,X_n}$. For models characterized by high value of $S^{Comb}_{Y,X_1,\dots,X_n}$, both RELIMP and the Adjusted RELIMP generate very similar results. However, when the value of $S^{Comb}_{Y,X_1,\dots,X_n}$is low, Adjusted RELIMP is preferable, as its value is more reasonable for variables, which are close to being insignificant. In the present study, I applied Adjusted RELIMP, despite having very high value of $S^{Comb}_{Y,X_1,\dots,X_n}$.

Relative importance of a given explanatory variable (in contrast to traditional regression methods) is not affected by correlation with other explanatory variables and is determined solely by the contribution of a given explanatory variable to explaining the behaviour of the dependent variable. In models characterized by a substantial correlation among at least some explanatory variables, SR is a more reliable tool to compute RELIMP in comparison to MVR (see [16], [17]).

Computing economic or technological potential: The potential is computed as a weighted average of the values of explanatory variables multiplied by relative importance (RELIMP) of these variables. Explanatory variable which is directly related to the dependent variable gets + sign, and explanatory variables inversely related to the dependent variable get – sign. I must note that when the similarity value of a given explanatory variable is less than 0.7 (which means that this variable is insignificant), the RELIMP of such explanatory variable is 0.

[16] *Idem*, "Relative Importance."
[17] *Idem*, "On measuring the relative importance."

The linear combination of explanatory variables, weighted by their RELIMP, (which is represented as a range between its minimum value and its maximum value for each variable), reflects the potential of the dependent variable to achieve satisfactory performance.

As was described in the section "Data Preparation", when using data expressed as intervals of values, it is necessary to run soft regression four times for every year (Max values for all variables, Min values for all variables, Max for dependent variables vs. Min values of explanatory variables, and Min for dependent variable vs. Max values of explanatory variables). The four regression runs generate four results, which again appear as a range between the lowest result and the highest results.

The Model of Economic Potential

I include the following explanatory variables in the model:

Exports per capita (Exports)- being a proxy for the degree of international competitiveness of a given economy in global markets (adjusted for population size). This variable indicates the bottom line: How much revenue (per capita) is earned by any given country in international markets, no matter what the mix of factors is creating competitive advantages or disadvantages.

Tertiary education enrolment (Tertiary)- Percentage of the relevant population group that attends tertiary education institutions. The percentage of the population attending academic studies can be viewed as a good quantitative proxy for the degree of social progress. It can also be considered as an indicator of investment in human capital – at least from the quantitative viewpoint.

High technology per capita (High-Tech)- refers to exports (per capita) of products associated with advanced technologies. This variable is an important proxy variable of international competitiveness, representing activities where technologies and human skills are dominant components of competitive advantage. In addition, this variable can supplement the "Tertiary Education" variable by illustrating to what extent the skills generated by higher education help to improve competitiveness in the technology-intensive markets, and hence it is also a proxy for quality of human capital.

Secondary education enrolment (Secondary)- Percentage of the relevant population group that attends secondary education institutions. This variable represents different aspect of human capital (in comparison to the "Tertiary education"). In addition, Secondary Education is also important in influencing social progress based on its unique mix of covered topics, depth of studies and the final outcome of shaping the social characteristics of young generation just entering adulthood.

Primary education enrolment (Primary) - Percentage of the relevant population group that attends primary education institutions. This variable represents the basic component of human capital and substantially reflects Social Progress.

Birth Rate - This is a proxy representing a degree of social progress. Large families are in general associated with agrarian economies, where the agricultural sector is usually characterized by traditional (and technologically backward) methods of production. On the

other hand, smaller families are usually associated with the aspiration to be part of the middle class (or above), and to acquire the education and skills needed for a successful career.

Strength of financial sector (Ratio) – is a variable representing the financial strength of the country and the deviation of its incentive structure vs global structure. It is computed as a ratio between the GDP computed based on conventional exchange between the local currency vs US dollar, and the GDP computed based on PPP (Purchasing Power Parity). In strong, High-Income economies, there is no substantial difference between the two measures of GDP. In fact, in some countries where currency is exceptionally strong, the GDP measured by conventional exchange is higher than PPP. In the financially weaker, Low-Income economies, the PPP measurement value is substantially higher, sometimes even by several hundred percent. This discrepancy exists due to 2 factors: (1) Lower income within the economy means lower costs of labour, thus labour-intensive products and services are much cheaper and allow greater purchasing possibilities, than would be possible under the global pricing system. (2) Structure of subsidies and taxes, designed to make the life of the low-income population more bearable, constitutes distortion of the incentive structure, and undermines economic performance of these countries in the long run.

Exports and High Tech represent International Competitiveness
High Tech, Tertiary, Secondary and Primary represent Human Capital.
Tertiary, Secondary, Primary and Birth Rate represent Degree of Social Progress.
Ratio represents the strength of the financial sector.

It is clear that the variables in this model are not independent of each other. Therefore, modelling tools assuming independence of explanatory variables cannot be applied successfully in this project. This is the main argument for using SR, which does not require independence of explanatory variables. This way the integrity and the common sense of the original model are maintained.

As a dependent variable representing successful economic performance, I selected measures of income per capita or value of output per capita: GDP per capita and GNI per capita.

The Model of Technological Potential

I include the following explanatory variables in the model:

Exports per capita (Exports)- A country having more Exports, earns more foreign exchange, which opens greater opportunities to acquire foreign technological and research resources.

Tertiary education enrolment (Tertiary)- Percentage of the relevant population group that attends tertiary education institutions. The percentage of the population attending academic studies can be viewed as a good quantitative of investment in human capital. Obviously, human capital is essential for technological potential.

Secondary education enrolment (Secondary)- Percentage of the relevant population group that attends secondary education institutions. This variable represents different aspect of human capital (in comparison to the "Tertiary education").

Primary education enrolment (Primary) - Percentage of the relevant population group that attends primary education institutions. This variable represents the basic component of human capital and substantially reflects Social Progress.
Tech Publications – This variable represents the amount of scientific and technological publications within each country. Scientific and Technological journals are essential for the dissemination of ideas, knowledge and information regarding most advanced technological developments.
ICT per capita (ICT) – Information and communication Technology services exports per capita. This variable represents one of the most important components of the High-Technology Sector. The ability of any given country to export such services is a good indicator of that country's international competitiveness and technological capabilities.
Measure of Economic Activity per capita (GDP). I utilize various varieties of GDP per capita and GNI per capita as measures of successful economic performance. The idea behind it is that more successful economies possess greater amount of resources available to develop and commercialize advanced technologies.
Strength of financial sector (Ratio) - is a variable representing the financial strength of the country and the deviation of its incentive structure vs global structure. It is computed as a ratio between the GDP computed based on conventional exchange between the local currency vs US dollar, and the GDP computed based on PPP (Purchasing Power Parity). This variable is described in more detail above. The idea of including this variable is similar to that of including GDP: countries having stronger financial sector tend to have easier time to finance advanced technological projects and investments.

Similarly to the previous model, variables in this model are not independent of each other. Therefore, modelling tools assuming independence of explanatory variables cannot be applied successfully here. This is an additional argument for using SR, which does not require independence of explanatory variables. This way the integrity and the common sense of the original model are maintained.

As a dependent variable representing Technological performance, I selected High-Technology exports per capita.

Results

The main objective of the comparative study presented here is to compare the economic and technological performance of Russia and its allied countries to (1) other East-European countries and (2) Advanced High-Income countries. The following tables enable comparison of Russia and its allies to the performance of East European countries. Technological potential can only be computed from the year 2000, because the data for some important explanatory variables are not available for the earlier years. As far as economic potential, it can be computed from the year 1960. All the values in the following tables enable comparison to the performance of the advanced, high-income economies, because for every year and every table, the average value for advanced High-Income countries is "1" (it is the result of the normalization process).

Technology:

Table 1a: Technology Potential of Russia

	2000	2007	2014	2018
Russia	0.25	0.32	0.29	0.29

Table 1a indicates that technology potential of Russia is very low in comparison to advanced, High-Income economies. The average value of the advanced countries is "1" for every year – thus the values for other countries are calculated and presented in comparative terms for every year. In other words: When a given country x makes some technological progress, but the advanced countries make even greater progress, the values for country X will actually drop, because the gap between the advanced countries and the country X will increase. Hence, based on Table 1, I can see that the technology potential of Russia is increasing very slowly, and can be described as very low throughout the period of 2000 – 2018.

Table 1b. Economic Potential of USSR

	1960	1965	1970	1978	1985	1992
USSR	0.45			0.36		0.47

The purpose of Table 1b is to compare the situation of the Soviet Union (First Cold War) to Russian Federation (Second Cold War). Since I cannot compare the two in terms of Technology Potential, because the data for some technology variables are not available before the year 2000, I decided to utilize a model of economic potential. From various Tables presented in this study, it is clear that there is a very close relation between Technology Potential and Economic Potential. In Table 1b the data for some years are missing, but the general trend is clear: Economic Potential of the USSR was much lower in comparison to the Advanced High-Income Economies, and it remained low throughout the period. It should be noted, that one of the major slogans of the Soviet Union was that their political and economic system is much superior in comparison to the countries of Western Alliance, and due to very rapid economic growth, the citizens of their country will soon enjoy higher standard of living. That forecast never materialized, and based on Table 1b, did not come even close to reality. The stress on the political and economic system due to technological and economic competition led eventually to the disintegration of the USSR. The inability to reach the standard of living of the Western countries was very important factor leading to the stress on the system over the years.

In order to reinforce the conclusions stated above, I can observe the results of Table 3, which has more complete data in comparison to Table 1b. The countries of Soviet-led alliance in East-Europe were characterized since 1965 by a continuous stagnation/decline of their economic potential. Hence, Table 3 supports the conclusions above.

Table 1c. Economic Potential of Russian Federation

	2000	2007	2014	2018

Russia	0.27	0.39	0.37	0.36

Table 1c displays the economic potential of the Russian Federation. When comparing Table 1a to Table 1c, I can see that Technology and Economic potential are closely related. When comparing the economic potential of the USSR to that of Russia (in comparison to High-Income economies), I can see that the values for Russian Federation are lower, and the trend is stagnating. Technology potential of Russia is also displaying stagnation over the years.

Table 2a: Technology Potential of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine

	2000	2007	2014	2018
Belarus	0.19	0.2	0.26	0.28
Moldova	0.07	0.06	0.11	0.12
Ukraine	0.13	0.14	0.13	0.12

Table 2a presents technology potential of countries allied Russia. All these countries have similar political systems (Ukraine until 2014). Their political, economic and legal systems are characterized by a very high level of corruption. The economies are mismanaged and non-competitive. Based on Table2a, Technology potential is very low and stagnating (in Belarus there was very slow increase over the years, but the values have remained low). In Table 2b I see similar results for the economic potential. I can also notice that the values of Economic Potential are usually higher than values of Technology Potential. This can be expected for the countries where technological sector is weak - substantial portion of economic potential is derived by other factors than technology: extraction of raw materials, tourism, remittances of workers employed in foreign countries, etc.

Table 2b: Economic Potential of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine

	2000	2007	2014	2018
Belarus	0.26	0.32	0.35	0.36
Moldova	0.12	0.14	0.16	0.17
Ukraine	0.21	0.29	0.25	

The general conclusions I can derived based on the Tables above: The political and economic system of Russian Federation and of its allied countries has failed to generate impressive performance. When the outcome is similar in all four countries, it tells us something about the system and its prospects of future success. The longer the Second Cold War lasts, the greater stress these systems will experience.

Note: In Ukraine, this stress has already led to change in the political system, breaking alliance with Russia and initiating the pro-Western orientation.

Table 3: Economic Potential of Soviet-allied East-European countries

	1960	1965	1970	1978	1985

Poland	0.47	0.67	0.5	0.45	0.28
Czechoslovakia	0.78		0.63	0.54	
Hungary	0.59	0.71	0.5	0.43	0.44
Romania			0.31	0.36	0.38

Finally, for the purpose of comparison, I present two more tables: Table 4a displays Technology Potential of East-European countries, and Table 4b displays Technology Potential of Baltic Countries.

Table 4a: Technology Potential of East-European countries

	2000	2007	2014	2018
Poland	0.36	0.49	0.51	0.59
Czechia	0.51	0.94	1.03	1.13
Slovakia	0.42	0.75	0.82	0.92
Hungary	0.48	0.72	0.67	0.73
Romania	0.15	0.3	0.39	0.47

It is easy to observe the upward trend in all the countries of the two groups. Some countries have experienced very rapid and impressive growth of their potential, while others grew at a slower pace. Some have even reached the Technology Potential of Advanced High-Income economies. All the countries in the two groups displayed successful performance.

Table 4b: Technology Potential of Baltic counties

	2000	2007	2014	2018
Estonia	0.44	0.76	1.11	1.15
Latvia	0.27	0.45	0.58	0.78
Lithuania	0.28	0.53	0.63	0.72

The conclusions are clear and unambiguous: following the disintegration of the USSR and the East-European Soviet-led bloc, the countries which reformed their political and economic system, and adopted pro-Western orientation in their political philosophy and market oriented economic systems, demonstrated consistent improvement of their performance. In contrast, countries such as Russian Federation and its allies, experienced continuous stagnation, and have been unable to close the gap vs. Advanced High-Income countries.

Summary and Conclusions

Present study addresses technological and economic performance of Russian Federation and its allies. I compare the performance of Russia to: (1) Soviet Union, (2) Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, (3) East-European countries and (4) Baltic countries. All the Tables contain values which could be compared to the Advanced High-Income countries (average High-Income economies have a value of "1").

I utilize the newly developed concepts of "Technology Potential" and "Economic Potential", which are more reliable measurement tool of economic/technological activities and capabilities.

The computations of "Economic Potential" are based on a cross-national model for years: 1960, 1965, 1970, 1978, 1985, 1992, 2000, 2007, 2014 and 2018, involving data from over 120 - 150 countries. The computations of "Technology Potential" are based on a cross-national model for years: 2000, 2007, 2014 and 2018, involving data from over 150 countries. The measurement of the "Potential" is based on the values of explanatory variables. It has been introduced in recent years and it is based on the idea that the combination of explanatory variables is more difficult to manipulate, than the values of traditionally used dependent variables. I compare the performance of the Russian Federation to the following groups of countries: (1) East European countries which are former members of East European Communist alliance (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania), (2) Baltic States, and (3) Countries allied with the Russian Federation: Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine until 2014. In addition, I compare Russian "Potential" to that of USSR.

The results of this study were generated by applying Soft Regression modelling tool (Soft Computing method). The data preparation process explained above, addressed the problem of outliers and missing data by utilizing interval-based modelling. The major advantages of the tools applied in this study, regarding the reliability of the results, were extensively discussed.

The group of East-European countries and the Baltic States displayed impressive improvement of their Potential over the period of 2000 – 2018. The general trend in all these countries was continuous improvement and substantially narrowing the gap vs advanced High-Income economies. On the other hand, the Russian Federation, and its allies: Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine have been characterized by low and stagnating potential.

During the First Cold War, USSR and its East-European allies had higher values of the Potential index, in comparison to Russian Federation and its allies. Hence, the prospects of Russia in the Second Cold War are not promising, in the case of protracted political confrontation.

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Part four.

Student contributions

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine and its Influence of the Rhetoric of the Bucharest Nine

Horațiu George Bontea

Abstract. The Bucharest Nine format was a significant reaction to the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine and occupation of Crimea, as well as to its hostility towards the countries of Eastern Europe. It has hosted seven summits between heads of state since its founding in 2015, three of which took place in the year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The unfortunate occurrence in Ukraine undoubtedly had an impact on B9's standing, and since the war began, it is undeniably strengthening its position in Eastern Europe's security.
In order to further understand the influence of the Russian invasion I will be tackling the following research question in my paper: "How has the Russian aggression in Ukraine affected the Bucharest Nine's role as an actor in the security of the Eastern flank?". As part of my research, I'll develop a discourse analysis of the B9 format to comprehend how it has changed over time, particularly in reference to the Russian Federation but also to NATO as the most important security guarantee. Then to better comprehend this actor's effect in the region, I will attempt to assess the actor's balance between its soft and hard power mechanisms.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine war, Bucharest 9, security, Eastern Flank, NATO

Introduction and Research Design

Bucharest 9 started quite slowly as an international format but reacted promptly to the war on the eastern flank and, step by step, developed as a very promiscuous actor in the security of Central-Eastern Europe and even an important factor in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's strategy. Still in a developing phase, this format could become an even more relevant security subject in the future of the eastern flank, taking into consideration the revisionist actions of the Russian Federation. At the same time, but more importantly, represent a clear moment to boost the credibility of the rhetoric of Central-Eastern European countries with the leadership of B9 maintained by heads of state from Poland and Romania. Thus, the actuality of the academic interest in this topic is represented by the still-on-going Russian aggression in Ukraine for almost two years. A war that represents one of the two most debated conflicts in the international arena seems very likely to enter its third year with a stalemate between the two counterparts, and the Western community is in a strategy dilemma on how to put an end to a conflict that favours its ally Ukraine. By looking at various factors in its security apparatus, NATO allies might consider in the future the influence of the Bucharest 9 in conflict mediation, and due to this scenario being reasonable, the B9 has the very potential to become a very relevant actor.

Having in mind the potential of this international format and the possibility of becoming a stronger voice, this paper proposes the goal of analysing the actual status of the rhetoric displayed during several summits in order to understand its past, define the present, and portray future perspectives. One of the research goals of this paper is to understand the regional importance of the member states and how it can offer them international security guarantees and strengthen their regional cooperation. Another research objective is the exploration of the

relations of both states individually and at the same time as members of the B9 format with the threats and opportunities in the eastern flank. The third and final objective is to analyse the future development of the region's security and integration. In order to tackle these points during the research process, the paper will focus on the following research question: "How has the Russian aggression in Ukraine affected the rhetoric of Bucharest Nine as an actor in the security of the Eastern flank?". Both the research question and the objectives will be related to secondary questions and independent variables in order to widen and deepen the analysis. One of these variables will be the western leaders' perceptions of the B9 that guarantee legitimacy in the international sphere for this forum. Another one is going to be the Russian threat due to its very high influence, from its first summit to the latest, as the key point in the security agenda of all the summits.

To respect the research goal and have an academic approach towards the rhetoric level, this paper is going to collect data in a qualitative manner, and the main methodology used to collect and interpret the data is discourse analysis from a postmodernist way of thinking. More specifically, in this case, the discourse analysis will be done with the help of the intertextual model of Julia Kristeva that is based on a comparison between "them and others" by correlating discourse with independent variables related to time and space to read verbatim with the purpose of outlining the correlation between identity and foreign policy. For the theoretical framework of this paper, the work of Joseph S. Nye on the concept of soft power is going to be central in the qualitative analysis of the B9: "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority)." Furthermore, there are some important limits to this research work that need to be briefly explained. When looking at the influence of the security debate on the eastern flanks, this paper still acknowledges NATO as the main security guarantee for the members of Bucharest 9. Rather, this paper focuses on the soft power leverage of this international format and takes into consideration the lack of hard power mechanisms that are part of the sovereignty of states. The main collaboration is in the NATO context.

Factors of Founding of the B9 and its Shortcomings in the First Years

Bucharest 9 was founded in November 2015 with the inauguration of the first summit held in Bucharest, which was held under the bilateral leadership of Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and Polish President Andrzej Duda.[1] The moment for organising this summit was a clear response from the Central-Eastern European block towards the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation.[2] This historical decision by Russia was more than just territorial claims. It was an attack on the sovereignty of Ukraine, denying the national identity of the Ukrainian people. Before the open conflict between Russia and Ukraine, in the internal political life of Ukraine, there was a crucial moment for the transition towards the European

[1] Ovidiu Vaida, "The Bucharest 9 Format between Rational Ambitious Goals and Real Influence," *Studia Europaea*, no. 2/2022, pp. 183-197, https://doi.org/10.24193/subbeuropaea.2022.2.07.
[2] Sergey Saluschev, "Annexation of Crimea: Causes, Analysis & Global Implications," *Global Societies Journal*, vol. 2/2014, pp. 37-44, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5vb3n9tc.

path and a stronger partnership with the Western block. The Revolution of Dignity, better known as the Maidan Revolution,[3] was a crucial moment in which the civil society of Ukraine denied the Russification of social and political life and expressed their willingness to become a European country from the point of view of political institutions, democratic principles, freedom, and human rights values. The offensive of the Russian Federation and the rhetoric of President Vladimir Putin were very much a hard power leverage to attack this societal change and a desperate try to realign the internal political life of Ukrainians in the Russian interest sphere.[4] A hard leverage in the foreign policy to reduce the soft power changes in the pivotal change of the Ukrainian citizens towards West and European values.

The conflict in 2014 did not end just with the annexation of Crimea but also with the partial occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk. Those regions were perceived by Vladimir Putin's leadership as belonging to the Russophile sphere, and based on the pro-Russian support, it led to the Donbas War.[5] Separatist movements in these regions were backed by Russia and tried during wartime to secure their independence, which was probably followed by the annexation to the Russian Federation, similar to what happened in Georgia in 2008 in the South Ossetian and Abkhazian contexts or what has been happening during the 2022 invasion. Due to the Ukrainian counteroffensives, it led to the Mink Agreements and a frozen conflict until its reescalation in February 2022. Unfortunately, it seems like Russia accepted this de facto frozen conflict to use these regions as political pressure on Ukrainian leaders to discourage their western transition, and when Zelensky's administration represented a clear change and the start of the European integration process, Putin restarted the conflict.

Based on these aggressive foreign policies and revisionist rhetoric from Russia, the Bucharest 9 format was started in order to construct a regional reaction for the security of the eastern flank. Besides the direct conflict and attacks on the sovereignty of Ukraine, the Russian foreign policy in the region continued to be quite aggressive and represented a possible threat to the security of Central-Eastern Europe.[6] It could be mentioned the continuous intervention in the internal political life of the Republic of Moldova in the case of Transnistria or the two cases mentioned above: frozen conflicts in Ukraine and separatist movements in Georgia combined with a stronger relationship with the Belarusian state that step by step lost the credibility of Minsk as a neutral space for the blocs to negotiate. Another important series of events is the military exercises on the eastern flank as a measure of deterrence that finally erupted in a direct war in February 2022. All these factors represented a foreign policy of Russia that threatened the NATO presence in the region and needed to be addressed by the member states. It could be argued that the economic sanctions or political decisions, such as the exclusion of Russia from the G8 format, were not enough to deter its revisionist action.

[3] Sergei I. Zhuk, "Ukrainian Maidan as the Last Anti-Soviet Revolution, or the Methodological Dangers of Soviet Nostalgia (Notes of an American Ukrainian Historian from Inside the Field of Russian Studies in the United States)," *Ab Imperio*, vol. 2014, no. 3/2014, pp. 195-208, https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2014.0062.

[4] Yuri Teper, "Official Russian Identity Discourse in Light of the Annexation of Crimea: National or Imperial?," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 4/2016, pp. 378-396, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1076959.

[5] Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner, "War and Identity: the Case of the Donbas in Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs,* vol. 34, no. 2-3/2018, pp. 139-157, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1452209.

[6] Tetyana Malyarenko and Stefan Wolff, *The Dynamics of Emerging De-Facto States Eastern Ukraine in the Post-Soviet Space*, New York: Routledge, 2019, pp. 59-74.

Thus, the founding of the B9 was a remarkable decision in the context of smaller states in the North Atlantic alliance, but what is still questionable is the consistency and recognition of its potential.[7]

In 2015, the first summit was a decisive moment in the way in which this institution will develop over the years based on the first topics approached in this first encounter between state leaders. In the first statement of Bucharest 9, entitled Joint Declaration on "Allied Solidarity and Shared Responsibility,"[8] it could be observed that the overall goal of this organisation is to outline the soft power characteristics of this international forum that is centred around a strong commitment to the sovereignty of the member states, "Reaffirming our strong attachment to the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights, as well as to the principles of international law, especially those of states' sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of borders, which are vital to the security in the Euro-Atlantic area." This position demonstrates B9 is a forum established to grow the level of cooperation, and taking into account the momentum of the foundation is a deterrent to Russian aggression.

Besides this general goal, B9 developed its soft power commitment under four points that could be described as founding principles: solidarity "a strong North-Atlantic Alliance, built on solidarity, capable of responding effectively to the long term security challenges and threats we face in our neighbourhood, in the East, in the South, and beyond", collaboration "a solid transatlantic bond, based upon a fair burden sharing, cohesion, indivisibility of security, solidarity and shared responsibility", security "renewed emphasis on NATO's collective defence, while paying due attention to crisis management and cooperative security" and peace "enlarging the area of peace, security and stability, defined by Euro-Atlantic values and principles, embodied by NATO's partnership and open-door policies". The first two about solidarity and collaboration are the starting point of this initiative as a political group with a common vision of Central-Eastern European member states in NATO due the same interest in the security of region in order to have a stronger voice and probably a coordination role in the North Atlantic Treaty's expansion in the eastern flank.[9]

The third and fourth points could be corelated to the common position of the B9 leaders in the next NATO summits based on seven goals - NATO values, eastern flank, long term vision, the economic burden, the open door policy, the need for a strategic approach in the region, the strategy with the Russian dialogue, a common response from all the member states and the relations between NATO and EU- to be supported by their international forum. B9 created a bigger political leverage for its 9 states and created a context to create a regional security agenda that has a bigger influence on the NATO strategical approach towards the eastern flank. Some scholars even discussed about importance of this international forum, but

[7] Oleksandra Davymuka, "Peculiarities of the Security Environment for the Bucharest Nine Countries in Terms of the Russian Threat," *Baltic Journal of Legal and Social Sciences*, No. 2/2022, pp. 41-46, https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2022-2-7.

[8] Romania's Permanent Delegation to NATO, "Joint Declaration on 'Allied Solidarity and Shared Responsibility'," *nato.mae.ro*, November 4, 2015, https://nato.mae.ro/en/local-news/904?fbclid=IwAR3c4DjXH9Q8VrnN1ZFL5jgudzUWYIpBDhGgvFjtYJwZQ8Inaf-CGA30q1s.

[9] Mirosław Banasik, "Bucharest Nine in the Process of Strategic Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank," *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies*, No. 1/2021, pp. 27-53, https://apcz.umk.pl/CJPS/article/view/36524/30782.

rather emphasis its role as extension to the NATO[10] interests but still limited with other formal group such as Visegrád Group in terms of multilateralism in the international arena.

Coming back to the founding moment, this paper aims to outline why the foundation of Bucharest 9 mattered until the Russian aggression in Ukraine in February 2022. The first and most important thing is the joint position. Since 2015, the nine states that are part of this format have been more cohesive during NATO summits and have succeeded in promoting the eastern flank security agenda. It could be argued that the western allies responded so well to the war in Ukraine under the significant influence of B9 multilateralism. The second thing is rather an identitarian perspective and its results in the foreign policies of the former Soviet Union space of influence. All nine countries that are taking part in the meeting of Bucharest 9 are former members of the Warsaw Pact, and this transition is a very important step in foreign policy to outline their strategic partnership with the USA and EU while at the same time deterring the revisionist rhetoric of the Kremlin regime, having in mind the aggression towards the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. Third and foremost, it did not stop Russia from committing an attack on the sovereignty of Ukraine. Taking into consideration the autocratic regime of Putin, it is quite hard for scholars or experts to predict the aggressiveness of the Russian Federation. But in contrast, clearly, the B9 tried to create a soft power reaction towards the violent display of Russia and stand in grounds for promoting its democratic values and a diplomatic response. This strategy was not enough, and after the events of February 2022, it could be argued that the rhetoric of B9 changed and its role in the future strategy of the eastern flank could evolve to react better to the revisionism of Russia.

Changes in the Rhetoric of Bucharest 9

Since its founding and until the aggression of Ukraine, there have been four meetings between the heads of state, four meetings between the foreign affairs ministers, and three meetings between the defence ministers. The meetings between the members of B9 were not regulated with the main purpose of continuing their common position in NATO summits, eastern flank security, Black Sea security, and support for the enlargement of the EU and NATO for the Eastern Neighbourhood.[11] Even if the Bucharest Nine discussed it, they lacked consistency because, after the founding moment, they stayed three years without a meeting between them. After the war in 2014, they missed an important chance to raise their deterrence policy and offered an opportunity for Russia to extend its hard policies in the region, and just in 2018, they re-started the meetings with just one meeting per year.

Another factor in their lack of progress in their first years of existence is the low support from strategic partners such as the USA and EU. One of the main reasons for the lack of involvement of the western allies of Bucharest 9 is the internal crisis generated by the Trump administration and the multilateral diplomatic issues with the European leaders. During his mandate, US

[10] Christelle Calmels, "NATO enlargement to the east: Bucharest nine as a game-changer within the Alliance" Engelsberg Programme for Applied History, Grand Strategy and Geopolitics, Centre for Conflict, Security, and Societies, 2019, pp. 1-32, https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03471342.

[11] Tomasz Pawłuszko, "The Rise of Geopolitics in Poland and Eastern Europe: The Three Seas and the Bucharest Nine Initiatives," *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies*, No. 1/2021, pp. 5–26, https://bibliotekanauki.pl/articles/1920244.pdf.

foreign policy was based on transactional strategy, and his main accusations towards European members were that they did not respect the percentage of GDP for defence. His discourse led to a tensioned series of meetings and even important reactions from other important leaders from NATO, such as French President Emanual Macron.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation spoke out strongly against Russia's aggressiveness during the invasion of Ukraine. The significance of Article 5 of the organisation's founding treaty was also emphasised during this time. According to this article "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."[12]

Even though NATO delivered a joint statement during the current worldwide security crisis to reaffirm the value of collective security within the transatlantic alliance, it is crucial to examine the communication issues that created serious concerns about the level of cooperation. Naturally, the first thing that comes to mind is the end of the Cold War, which significantly reduced the principal security threat to NATO.[13] However, NATO reinvented its standing as an international actor through the peacekeeping operations in Kosovo and Libya during the brief period of American primacy in international affairs.[14] NATO subsequently established itself as a global actor engaged in humanitarian issues within the international community and even made a significant contribution in this area through its words and deeds that established significant precedents.

Coming back to the most recent identity crisis was brought on by the former American president Donald Trump's doubts about the value of this alliance, which seriously hindered his ability to communicate with European leaders.[15] The 2018 NATO summit in Brussels marked a turning point in this situation. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's security assurances were reiterated, but the public's attention was drawn to the contentious discussions between Trump and European leaders, where there were vehement charges made over the Russian-German alliance through Nord Stream 1. The topic rekindled a heated debate in the European community on the need for autonomous defensive measures by the European Union.[16]

From the perspective of the independence of European security, there were a number of extremely pertinent responses to this scenario. French President Emmanuel Macron was one

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[12] Minster of Foreign Affairs, "North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Charter," article 5, April 4, 1949, https://www.mae.ro/sites/default/files/file/pdf/TRATATUL%2520NORD-ATLANTIC.pdf,.

[13] Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift,* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005, pp. 201-225.

[14] Laura-Maria Herţa, "Jus in Bello and the Solidarist Case for Humanitarian Intervention. From Theory to Practice," *Studia Europaea*, vol. 58, no. 1/2013, pp. 5-48, http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/download/pdf/772.pdf.

[15] Dick Zandee, "NATO in the Trump Era: Surviving the Crisis," Clingendael Institute, 2018, pp. 1-6, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21315.

[16] Eleni Lazarou, "2018 NATO Summit: A Critical Time for European Defence," European Parliamentary Research Service, July 10, 2018, https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1332480/2018-nato-summit/1936059/.

of the most outspoken European politicians in this regard. He delivered a speech that was specific to Gaullism in which he repeatedly emphasised the necessity for Europe to become significantly more autonomous in terms of defence mechanisms.[17] An idea that was also extended by Geir Lundestad who foreseen the necessity for autonomy in the European Union. He discussed the necessity for a far more aggressive policy to advance European interests in the realm of international relations and had harsh critiques of how NATO operated, including the claim that it was "brain dead." We preferred to label Macron's speech as Gaullist because it is not the first time, we have seen these elements against the American security umbrella, which have also been found in French leaders such as Sarkozy.[18]

Through these discursive acts of the various leaders' parts of the transatlantic partnership, we can see how their positions constantly influenced NATO's stability. Instead, from the standpoint of efficiency, NATO has not experienced a serious crisis, but rather from the standpoint of negotiating the interests of the alliance's member states. Each member seeks to maximise its national potential through this cooperation, and as a result, NATO's basic ideals and even its primary goal have been altered on numerous occasions. However, one point that might be made very obvious in this current security issue in Ukraine is that member state cooperation and a unified voice results in better outcomes than the sum of the members acting independently. Thus, this episode clearly affected the development of the B9 during its first years, but in the aftermath, these issues were resolved both in internal and external matters.

Both the issues of international support and consistency have been tackled since 2021, and they were even moving the Bucharest 9 to the next level of relevance after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Western community started to be more involved in multilateral diplomacy with the B9 countries after the change of the American administration when Joe Biden was elected as president, which at the same time started an on-going process to re-establish the credibility of relations between NATO countries.[19] This foreign policy direction positively influenced the international recognition of the Bucharest 9 format and even led to the direct participation of important leaders from NATO and the European Union in the summits of the Central-Eastern European countries. Also, the issue of consistency was tackled by the members due to the fact that since the war on the eastern flank, they held bi-annual (in February and June) meetings in which they continued to work on their common positions, develop their security agenda, expand their multilateral diplomacy, and grow their support for the Ukraine and its war against Russia, but at the same time for the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Western Balkans.

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[17] Strategic Comments, "Macron's Strategic Vision for Europe," *Strategic Comments*, vol. 26, no. 2/2020, pp. iv-vi, https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2020.1751419.
[18] Frédéric Bozo, "Explaining France's NATO 'Normalisation' under Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–2012)," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4/2014, pp. 379–391, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2014.962737.
[19] Anda Ghilescu, "The Foreign Policy of the United States in the Post-Trump Era," in Valentin Naumescu (ed.), *Great Powers' Foreign Policy Approaching the Global Competition and the Russian War against the West*, Leiden: Brill, 2023, pp. 23-75.

Bucharest 9 reacted extremely quickly to the war in Ukraine and held an extraordinary summit just one day after the Russian invasion. One remark of President Duda[20] is very important for the relevance of B9 in the context: “I agree with the appeal of President Volodymyr Zelensky, who said, ‘If you do not help us today, war will knock on your door tomorrow’. The countries in our region should understand these words better than anyone else. Much of the history of the 20th century in our part of Europe was overshadowed by Russian domination. We know very well the line of thought adopted by the Russian political elite. They understand only the language of force. This is how Tsarist Russia, then Communist Russia, and now Putinist Russia functioned. The time has come to jointly speak out to the Russians in the same language.” This again outlines the symbolic role of Bucharest 9, as the countries have a history of Russian aggression and are now collectively prepared to respond. Another important aspect of this meeting is the participation of European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen,[21] which shows how important this summit is to the region, which has a strong relationship with the European Union as all the members are part of the EU and will work together for a European approach.

In the next summit held on June 10, 2022, Bucharest 9 presented a Declaration of the Heads of State[22] with 11 points that again outlining the condemnation of Russian aggression, support for Ukraine, stressing the issue of cyber warfare, the open-door policy, and also accusing Belarus of complicity. Another highlight of this meeting is the participation of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg,[23] who is another key leader in the recognition of B9 importance and represents a future role for B9 in the eastern flank. This meeting reconfirmed the role of B9 in the security architecture of NATO and encouraged the leaders to continue their security approach that benefits both B9 and NATO.

Two days before the anniversary of one year of the conflict in Ukraine, the B9 leaders met again to discuss their foreign policy and their strategic approach to the developments of the conflict. The important moments of this meeting were the political pressure on all the NATO members to support the open-door policy for Sweden and Finland, and at the same time, they fully announced their support for the European integration process for Ukraine. At this summit, together with Jens Stoltenberg Joe Biden was also present[24], and this represented one of the highest successes of the diplomacy of the Bucharest Nine that succeeded in working

[20] The official website of the President of the Republic of Poland, “Bucharest Nine Summit in Warsaw,” *PRESIDENT.PL* - News, February 25, 2022, https://www.president.pl/news/president-calls-for-military-aid-to-ukraine,49477.

[21] European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), “President von der Leyen participates in Bucharest Nine (B9) Summit in Warsaw and in special NATO Summit,” February 25, 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/president-von-der-leyen-participates-bucharest-nine-b9-summit-warsaw-and-special-nato-summit-2022-02-25_en.

[22] President of Romania, “Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting,” June 10, 2022, https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/declaration-of-the-heads-of-state-bucharest-9-meeting-bucharest-june-10-2022.

[23] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, “NATO Secretary General takes part in B9 Summit,” June 10, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_196378.htm?selectedLocale=en.

[24] The White House, “Readout of President Biden’s Meeting with the Leaders of the Bucharest Nine Eastern Flank NATO Allies,” February 22, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/02/22/readout-of-president-bidens-meeting-with-the-leaders-of-the-bucharest-nine-eastern-flank-nato-allies/.

directly with the foreign policy leaders of the US in developing a Joint Statement[25] based on common position and democratic values.

The last meeting of the summit Bucharest 9 was on June 6, 2023, and it continued to solidify its position as a very interesting international actor in the near future if the member states profit from their position. During this meeting, B9 really started to act as a more involved actor in international relations. In the region, they outlined again their support for the war in Ukraine against Russian aggression and extended their commitment to support the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and the Western Balkans countries in their NATO security alliance and European Union membership pursuits.[26] Again, during this summit, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was presented for the third consecutive time,[27] which confirms the high level of credibility in this international format.

By looking at these four summits, it could be argued that not just that B9 overcame the issues in its first years of functioning, but that by focusing on their foreign policy in the security crisis on the eastern flank, they succeeded in constructing a better rhetoric for their international format. First, they solidified their role as an international actor with a very strong regional security agenda. Their meetings are now consistent with bi-annual summits in February and June and are organised in collaboration with important NATO and EU leaders, which shows that their strategic approach could be extended to high-level international institutions. Second, based on the realisations mentioned above, their discourse becomes more and more influential and is considered to be a stronger voice within the eastern flank. Bucharest 9 has both important positions in the security agenda of Western community foreign policy, and this international summit represents an important political leverage in the favour of non-member states such as Ukraine[28] or the Republic of Moldova. NATO and EU had a strong response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine;[29] thus, it could be argued that the rhetoric of the B9 before the event and in the aftermath represented an important independent variable that used public discourse to build a real security threat based on the identity of the Russian revisionism and the need to have a European and Allied response to it.

Besides their internal foreign policy decisions, another very influential factor in the development of B9 is the interaction with the external factors that facilitate the growth of influence. Here, the paper will briefly explain the discourse analysis of the validation coming from Joe Biden, Ursula von der Leyen, and Jens Stoltenberg based on the intertextual model.[30]

[25] President of Romania, "Joint statement by the leaders of Bucharest Nine," February 22, 2022, https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/joint-statement-by-the-leaders-of-bucharest-nine-warsaw-22-february-2023.
[26] The official website of the President of the Republic of Poland, "Statement by the leaders of the Bucharest Nine," June 6, 2023, https://www.president.pl/news/statement-by-the-leaders-of-the-bucharest-nine,69552
[27] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, "Secretary General Joins B9 Leaders to Prepare for NATO's Vilnius Summit," June 6, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_215423.htm.
[28] Sergiy Gerasymchuk, "Bucharest Nine: Looking for Cooperation on NATO's Eastern Flank?," Kiev: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2019, pp. 1-12, https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/15574.pdf.
[29] Valentin Naumescu, "Introduction: Great-Power Competition, Revisionism and War: How Putin's Invasion Reinvented the West," in Naumescu (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-22.
[30] Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in Leon S. Roudiez. (ed.), *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, New York: Columbia University Press,1980, pp. 64-99, quoted in Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 49-57.

As mentioned in the introduction, the intertextual model explains the correlation between foreign policy and identity by looking at the variables at several levels of analysis structured in models (model 1 official discourses, model 2 extended foreign policy debates, model 3A cultural representations, and model 3B fringe political discourses). Thus, this analysis will look into how these three leaders, as president of the United States of America, president of the European Commission, and NATO Secretary General, influenced the rhetoric of Bucharest 9. During their participation in B9 summits, Stoltenberg declared, "NATO Allies have never been more united," Biden publicly said, "You're the frontlines of our collective defence, and you know, better than anyone, what's at stake in this conflict," and von der Leyen declared, "Today, we are more determined than ever to hold the Kremlin accountable for its barbaric acts and to support the people of Ukraine in any way we can." All these discourses strengthen various points in the rhetoric in B9, such as their regional importance, the common and strategic approach of NATO members, and the Russian threat to the security of Europe. By having international recognition and full-on support, Bucharest 9 evolved and became more and more active in the region, and in the near future, it has the potential to grow even more in the international arena.

Thus, Bucharest 9 is an interesting actor in the region of Central-Eastern Europe and recognized in the international sphere, but its evolution is still ongoing are there are several scenarios to consider. As it could be seen, its discourse was heavily dependent on the Russian threat and multilateral diplomatic relations with NATO and EU. Soon the Ukrainian-Russian war will enter in its third and probably there will be another summit of B9 in February 2024 and their decision might play significant role in the conflict resolution strategy of both NATO and EU. Maybe a bigger deterrence factor will be the transition from a soft power towards a smart power taking into consideration the NATO capabilities combined with a possible collaboration between the member states. At the same time, the election in the USA and a possible change in the American foreign policy with a new president could clearly negatively impact the development of this institution if USA will move again in a transactional or isolationist foreign policy towards the security of Europe.

Conclusion

The first summit of Bucharest 9 represented a regional reaction of Central-Eastern European states towards the annexation of Crimea and the Donbas War. In the founding moment of this international format, the rhetoric focused on the need for a common position against the revisionist foreign policy of the Russian Federation and to create a context for a multilateral approach to the security agenda on the eastern flank. Vladimir Putin's Russia grew stronger in the region and reacted violently to the Western presence in the former Soviet space, and thus, together with its imperialist discourse, started to have a more violent approach with hard policies of military exercises and even direct war with Ukraine. When they attacked in 2014, it was not just about a territorial issue but a foreign policy of denial of Ukrainian identity and supporting Russian supremacy. As a result, B9 started with ambitious goals for a common position between the members and the need to assume a stronger voice in NATO in order to deter Russia and expend the presence of the North Alliance in the region.

Nowadays, it could be argued that Bucharest 9 succeeded in gaining support for their security agenda on the eastern flank, but it was not an easy task for the multilateral diplomacy of this international format. One of the reasons for this non-linear development was the lack of consistency in the meeting between the heads of state in B9. The activity of their summits could be divided into two phases: the first phase is represented by the deterrence and security response to the annexation of Crimea and the Donbas War between 2015 and 2022, and the second phase is influenced by the restarting and scaling of the war in Ukraine since 2022 to the present day. In the first part, they were not consistent in their meetings, with just four meetings in seven years, compared to the second part, when they held bi-annual meetings in February and June and grew their commitments towards the B9 agenda. Another reason, and arguably more influential, is the general NATO context that was tense during this period. The USA's administration of Trump was in an opposite position with the European leaders and negatively affected the credibility of the EU/European security alliance with the United States. The transactional approach of Trump even generated important public criticism from French President Emmanuel Macron, who outlined the problem of NATO and the need to reinforce autonomy in the defence policy of the EU.

Even if things were taking a better path since the election of Joe Biden as president of the US, the Russian Federation took the opportunity to discourage the NATO presence and started the war in Ukraine in February 2022. The war in Ukraine significantly impacted the international arena and especially the region of eastern flank. B9 successfully reacted to this security crisis and overcame both of the issues presented in this paper. They became more consistent in the meetings, solidified their role as an international actor, and grew their relevance in the region by having a stronger voice in the security approach of NATO. At the same time, they were more and more aligned with NATO and EU priorities due to the recognition gained from the constant participation of Jens Stoltenberg in B9 summits and other leaders such as Joe Biden and Ursula von der Leyen. All three confirmed and supported each other over the years. Thus, Bucharest 9 will be a very interesting variable from the near security perspective of NATO, and its future summits could define several scenarios, such as a possible transition to smart power or the opposite direction of losing its credibility due to external or internal factors. important aspects of the security agenda constructed by B9 in their joint positions or statements over the years. Thus, Bucharest 9 will be a very interesting variable from the near security perspective of NATO, and its future summits could define several scenarios, such as a possible transition to smart power or the opposite direction of losing its credibility due to external or internal factors.

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From the Halls of Parliament to the World Stage: How Moldovan and Romanian Parliamentarians Shape Foreign Policy

Alex Cozma

Abstract. This study explores parliamentary diplomacy within the contexts of the Republic of Moldova and Romania, shedding light on its dynamic role in shaping foreign policy and international relations. Examining the institutionalisation of parliamentary diplomacy, the paper presents a conceptual framework scrutinised through interviews with Moldovan and Romanian Members of Parliament and official documents. The study identifies key themes, emphasising strategic adaptation to geopolitical events, the enhancement of soft power through parliamentary friendship groups, and the norm entrepreneurial role of parliamentary standing committees. Noteworthy initiatives, such as United4Moldova, illustrate successful European integration strategies. The study underscores the collaborative nature of diplomacy within international platforms, challenging conventional views and highlighting the importance of collective efforts. The findings contribute nuanced insights to parliamentary diplomacy literature, recognizing contextual specificity and providing a comprehensive exploration of untapped potential in parliamentary friendship groups. The paper concludes by offering actionable measures for policymakers, emphasising the adaptive strategies employed by the Secretariat of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and promoting resilience in the face of dynamic global situations. Overall, the research provides guidance for parliamentarians engaged in diplomatic endeavours and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of parliamentary diplomacy.

Keywords: Parliamentary diplomacy, Republic of Moldova, Romania, European integration, International parliamentary institutions

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape is witnessing challenges to the Western democratic international order, primarily arising from revisionist forces, thereby exacerbating fault lines among state actors. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which not only constitutes a severe threat to peace in Europe, existentially questions the Republic of Moldova. Following the initiation of the 2022 phase of the Russo-Ukrainian War, both Ukraine and Moldova promptly submitted applications for European Union (EU) membership, a move that culminated in their attainment of candidate country status within four months after February 24, 2022. Consequently, Moldova's foreign policy doctrine undergoes a transformative shift, pivoting from previously inconclusive perspectives regarding EU accession to a rapid institutionalisation of Europeanisation.[1] This strategic shift is propelled by the imperative to align with the prevailing popular and political sentiments manifested in the 2023 "European Moldova" Gathering Resolution.[2] Despite its modest size, Moldova grapples with complex

[1] Silvia Cebotari, Victoria Bevziuc, "Moldo-European Relations in the Context of the War in Ukraine," *Analele Universității din Oradea, Editura Universității din Oradea*, 2022, pp. 101–112.
[2] REZOLUȚIE a Adunării „Moldova Europeană", Adoptată În Piața Marii Adunări Naționale La 21 Mai 2023 (2023) (Resolution of the European Moldova Assembly, adopted in the Grand National Square, May 21, 2023),

challenges, starting with security concerns stemming from the self-proclaimed Transnistrian separatist region and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Furthermore, the nation contends with sub-systemic resistance to democratisation and Europeanisation,[3] underscoring the dynamics within Moldova's socio-political landscape.

The Republic of Moldova's definitive steps towards Europe can easily be explained by the internal political developments that started with Maia Sandu's election for President of the Republic of Moldova in 2020. Faced with a hostile majority in Parliament, President Sandu dissolved the 10th legislature and called for snap parliamentary elections in 2021, thus securing for the pro-European forces both the legislative and the executive branches, winning a 63/101 majority in Parliament for the centre-right PAS (Party of Action and Solidarity) and appointing the Gavriliță cabinet shortly after. On March 3, 2022, as an aftermath of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Moldova submitted its application to join the European Union, which was officially granted candidate status to Moldova on June 23, 2022. Setting an ambitious goal, Moldova established a target date of 2030 for its accession to the European Union. On December 14, 2023, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine. Given the extraordinary geopolitical context, the time between Chișinău and Kyiv submitting a formal application and receiving green light from the European Council for their candidacy is significantly shorter than the EU average of 3.5 years.[4]

Given the parliamentary majority of PAS and the historical chance the Republic of Moldova has to cut loose from its pattern of swinging between European- and Eurasian-oriented foreign policy, I argue that the reshaping of Moldova's future into a definitive European Union Member State owes in part to the operationalisation of parliamentary diplomacy initiatives by Members of Parliament from Romania and Moldova. This article will investigate the ways in which Moldovan and Romanian parliamentarians use their international capacities in order to promote the European accession, democratic reform and Europeanisation of the Republic of Moldova. The primary research question is "how do Moldovan and Romanian MPs use parliamentary diplomacy in order to contribute to the Republic of Moldova's assumed foreign policy objective of joining the European Union until 2030?" To outline a comprehensive mapping of these efforts, the objective of this work is the assessment of the mechanisms through which Moldovan and Romanian parliamentarians act. Such endeavour is vital for shedding light on a practice that becomes more ingrained in the arena of contemporary international relations and for qualitatively evaluating the strategies used by Moldovan and Romanian MPs with this prerequisite in mind. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute valuable insights to both academic and practical domains. As parliamentary diplomacy gains significant scholarly attention, understanding its framework and particularities contributes to more effectively using it as a tool for projecting soft power

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https://www.presedinte.md/rom/discursuri/rezolutie-a-adunarii-moldova-europeana-adoptata-in-piata-marii-adunari-nationale-la-21-mai-2023.

[3] Dana Paiu, "Republic of Moldova - European Aspirations and Impediments to Integration," *Administrarea Publică* (Public Administration), vol. 1, no. 113/March 2022, pp. 139–49, https://doi.org/10.52327/1813-8489.2022.1(113).13.

[4] Rebecca Leppert, "European Union Membership: How Countries Join, and More," July 26, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/07/26/how-exactly-do-countries-join-the-eu/.

abroad. By addressing the research question and its objective, the paper not only adds to the existing body of literature on parliamentary diplomacy but also offers practical implications for policymakers, parliamentary advisors, and other professionals in the world of politics. Consequently, the outcomes of this research have the potential to inform of mechanisms, practices and strategies used for expanding a country's global reach and contribute to the broader discussion on the role of a parliamentarian in 2024.

Literature Review

Since the end of the Cold War, international parliamentary cooperation has grown as a phenomenon. The multiplication of liberal democracies and increased agency of parliamentarians was accommodated by the growth in number of international parliamentary institutions (IPIs) which address regional and global issues.[5] With changing dynamics in international relations, parliamentary diplomacy emerged in response to globalisation, alongside the relevance of non-state actors in foreign affairs. It serves as a tool for like-minded parliaments and parliamentarians for understanding and developing common solutions. By fostering bilateral and multilateral cooperation, parliamentary diplomacy is a useful practice for knowledge transfer and projecting soft power abroad.[6] Thus, through parliamentary diplomacy, what is deemed the "parliamentarisation of international affairs"[7] results in a more inclusive and democratic approach to international relations, where parliaments play a role in representing the people and contributing to decision-making processes, as well as an increase in democratic government oversight over international policies and legitimacy for international organisations.[8] Moreover, parliamentary diplomacy acts as a complement to traditional first-track diplomacy conducted by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs.[9]

Given the multiple directions in which parliamentary diplomacy can be used by Members of Parliament, a comprehensive discussion is to be held in regard to the types of contexts in which parliamentary diplomacy can take place. Previous scholarly work identifies the bilateral and multilateral levels of contact between parliaments and parliamentarians and expands upon the kind of institutionalisation each format can have. Bilateral parliamentary diplomacy can be observed within the frameworks of friendship groups, standing committees, formal bilateral cooperation, and bilateral exchanges between members of the legislative and executive branches.[10] Multilateral parliamentary diplomacy entails a wider array of

[5] Andrea Cofelice, Stelios Stavridis, "The European Parliament as an International Parliamentary Institution (IPI)," *European Foreign Affairs Review* vol. 19, no. 2/May 1, 2014, pp. 145–78, https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2014008.

[6] Natalie Leibrandt-Loxton, "South Africa's Bilateral Parliamentary Diplomacy as a Soft Power Tool of Attraction: Successes and Challenges," *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa* vol. 42, no. 1/December 22, 2020, pp. 121–144, https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v42i1.200.

[7] Olivier Costa, Clarissa Dri, Stelios Stavridis, *Parliamentary Dimensions of Regionalization and Globalization*, Cham: Springer, 2013.

[8] Mohamad Reza Majidi, "Parliamentary Diplomacy: Its Evolution and Role in International Relations," *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* vol. 12, no. 34/July 2021, pp. 306–29, https://doi.org/10.22034/IRFA.2021.162036.

[9] Cantikaputri Febrianti, Ella Syafputri Prihatini, "Parliamentary Diplomacy in Supporting Palestinian Independence: Evidence from Indonesia," in T.N. Mursitama, Noerlina, D.N. Utama, and S.A. Abrori (eds.), *E3S Web of Conferences* vol. 426/2023, pp. 1-20, https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202342602112.

[10] Leibrandt-Loxton, *art. cit.*

opportunities for cooperation, accordingly, named parliamentary cooperation initiatives,[11] which identify two approaches of categorising multilateral parliamentary diplomacy. On one hand, multilateral parliamentary diplomacy can be institutionalised as interparliamentary NGOs or networks of parliamentarians, international or regional parliamentary organisations, parliamentary specialised agencies, and parliamentary organs of international or regional organisations.[12] On the other hand, multilateral parliamentary diplomacy is seen taking place in transnational networks of parliamentarians, international parliamentary institutions (IPIs), international parliamentary organisations, international parliamentary organs, and inter-regional parliamentary cooperation formats.[13] Both approaches acknowledge the existence of informal transnational networks of parliamentarians and IPIs, Kissling distinguishing between networks, organisations, specialised agencies, and platforms, while Cofelice emphasises transnational networks, IPIs, and further categorises IPIs into international parliamentary organisations and international parliamentary organs. However, within these conceptual frameworks, less attention was paid to the political operationalisation of said formats of multilateral parliamentary diplomacy.

International parliamentary institutions (IPIs) play a central role in defining how states and parliamentarians' rapport themselves to the practice of parliamentary diplomacy, thus being imperative to comprehend these institutions in order to set a common understanding of the functions and potential IPIs present. An international parliamentary institution is an international institution that is (1.) a regular forum for multilateral deliberations on an established basis of an either legislative or consultative nature, (2.) either attached to an international organisation or itself constituting one, (3.) in which at least three states are represented by parliamentarians, (4.) who are either selected by national legislatures in a self-determined manner or popularly elected by electorates of the Member States.[14] Referring to the aforementioned Kissling and Cofelice approaches, we can pinpoint the relevant IPIs for the scope of this study - European Parliament, OSCE PA and PACE - as international parliamentary organs. These parliamentary assemblies, established or confirmed through international treaties, operate under the authority of superior systems within international or regional organisations, integral to their overall structures. Despite possessing distinct statutes, organs, and budgets, their decision-making authority over budgets is often not exclusive, allowing for a degree of independence. In contrast to parliamentary organisations and agencies, these assemblies hold a favourable position regarding rule-making and oversight powers over

[11] Franklin De Vrieze, "Study on Parliamentary Cooperation: Mapping and Analysis of International Parliamentary Institutions and Parliamentary Networks in the Western Balkans and South-East Europe," *Agora Portal for Parliamentary Development*, EUROPEAN COMMISSION, February 4, 2015.

[12] Claudia Kissling, "The Legal and Political Status of International Parliamentary Institutions," in L. Levi, G. Finizio, & N. Vallinoto (eds.), *The Democratization of International Institutions*, London: Routledge, 2014.

[13] Andrea Cofelice, "International Parliamentary Institutions: Some Preliminary Findings and Setting a Research Agenda," UNU-CRIS Working Papers, Bruges: UNU Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies, 2012, pp. 1–37, https://cris.unu.edu/international-parliamentary-institutions-some-preliminary-findings-and-setting-research-agenda.

[14] Robert M. Cutler, "The OSCE's Parliamentary Diplomacy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus in Comparative Perspective," *Studia Diplomatica* vol. 59, no. 2/2006, pp. 79–93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44839518

affiliated international organisations, subject to the permissions of the governing body. They legally partake in the international personality of the parent organisation, exercising varied degrees of authority. Some assemblies can only adopt recommendations to governmental bodies, while others can demand reporting, attendance, or addresses from parliamentary and governmental organs. These assemblies also have the right to pose questions and request appearances from governmental organs. Typically, if funded by governments, the assembly's budget is not independently determined unless financed directly by national parliaments.[15]

The scholarship surrounding the Republic of Moldova's efforts in international and domestic democratisation and Europeanization is experiencing a notable expansion. Particularly noteworthy is the consensus that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine stands as a pivotal moment in the Republic of Moldova's journey toward European accession. This geopolitical event has effectively accelerated Chișinău's initiatives to align itself with the European bloc, marking a decisive turning point in the nation's trajectory.[16] Over the course of three decades, the dynamic relationship between the European Union and Moldova has undergone significant transformations, progressing from various legal frameworks of cooperation [Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1994), European Neighbourhood Policy (2004), Eastern Partnership (2009), EU-Moldova Association Agreement (July 2016), EU-Moldova Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (2016)] to the acknowledgment of EU membership candidate status.[17] The subsequent phase involves the commencement of membership negotiations, underscoring the evolving nature of Moldova's association with the European Union. However, the political landscape within Moldova has been notably characterised by a backdrop of instability and a gradual pace in the implementation of internal reforms. These factors have posed challenges and impeded seamless cooperation between Moldova and the EU.[18] Despite these challenges, recent elections have resulted in political forces advocating for Moldova's accession to the EU and ambitious internal reforms.[19]

The literatures on parliamentary diplomacy and the Republic of Moldova's European integration have briefly intersected with Silvia Dulschi's 2011 article *Diplomația parlamentară - factor important în cooperarea internațională* (eng. Parliamentary Diplomacy - an Important Factor in International Cooperation). The paper delves into the vital role of parliamentary relations in advancing legislative frameworks for reforms and facilitating Moldova's integration into the European Union. It emphasises the need for robust parliamentary diplomacy to effectively address the challenges associated with European integration. Additionally, the paper highlights the significance of parliamentary diplomacy in contributing to European integration efforts, seeking support from EU Member States for legislative and

[15] De Vrieze, *art. cit.*
[16] *Ibidem.*
[17] Olesia Tkachuk, "Three Decades of Relations between the European Union and Moldova – from Cooperation to the Membership Perspective," *Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej*, no. 16/February 22, 2023, pp. 223–41, https://doi.org/10.14746/rie.2022.16.13.
[18] Paiu, *art. cit.*
[19] Svetlana Cebotari, "Relațiile Republica Moldova—Uniunea Europeană în Contextul Războiului din Ucraina" (The relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU in the context of the Ukraine war), Jean Monnet International Conference "The Eastern Partnership: towards a European community of democracy and prosperity," Chișinău.

institutional adjustments aligned with European standards. Recognising the increasing influence of national parliaments and European assemblies in the era of globalisation, it positions parliamentary diplomacy as a crucial tool for communication and the advocacy of global values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Furthermore, the paper underscores the growing importance of parliamentary relations in shaping legislative frameworks for reforms and underscores the pivotal role of parliamentary activities in enhancing the country's international presence. Moreover, it emphasises the crucial role of parliamentary diplomacy in championing the interests of the Republic of Moldova on the global stage, particularly amid the Moldovan-Russian dispute in the Transnistrian region, highlighting the significance of parliamentary engagements in fortifying the country's international standing and securing support from international organisations, other states, and potential donors.[20]

The existing bodies of literature regarding parliamentary diplomacy and the Republic of Moldova's European integration offer valuable insights into the international parliamentary frameworks for cooperation, the relations of the Republic of Moldova with the West in light of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the internal reform efforts undertook by Chișinău in order to Europeanise the Republic of Moldova. In addition, bridging the two literatures has been done before. However, there are multiple gaps this paper aims to fill. First, the existing literature on parliamentary diplomacy employs too little of a state-centric view. Previous works describe parliamentary diplomacy almost exclusively with an IPI as a focal point or framework for analysis. Those works employing a state-centric view[21] concentrate on countries outside of Europe. This study will take a state-centric approach in a European context. Second, while there has already been a preliminary article focusing on Moldovan parliamentary diplomacy, since its publication there have been numerous developments, such as EU-Moldova Association Agreement (2016), EU-Moldova Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (2016), full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022), granting EU candidate country status to Moldova (2022) and opening negotiations with the EU (2023) that recalibrate the premises for studying the Republic of Moldova's parliamentary diplomacy. Addressing these gaps is crucial for refining the theoretical framework and enhancing the practical relevance of parliamentary diplomacy research in the Moldovan context.

Real World Territory

The European Parliament (EP) is deemed as a complex actor engaging in parliamentary diplomacy, as its *sui generis* structure allows for parliamentary diplomacy both within the structure of the Parliament (intra-EU parliamentary diplomacy), as well as outside the EU, with the EP acting as a unitary actor in international affairs.[22] The EPs role in EU external relations has been strengthened by the Lisbon Treaty, providing it with expanded foreign affairs

[20] Silvia Dulschi, "Diplomația parlamentară—Factor important în cooperarea internațională" (Parliamentary diplomacy – an important factor in international cooperation), *Administrarea Publică,* vol. 1(69), pp. 135–138.
[21] Cantikaputri Febrianti, Ella Syafputri Prihatini, "Parliamentary Diplomacy in Supporting Palestinian Independence: Evidence from Indonesia," in Mursitama, Utama, and Abrori (eds.), *op. cit.*; Leibrandt-Loxton, *art. cit.*
[22] Davor Jancic, "World Diplomacy of the European Parliament," in Davor Jancic & Stelios Stavridis (eds.), *Parliamentary Diplomacy in European and Global Governance* Vol. 13, Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 17-40.

prerogatives. Despite this enhancement, the Parliament's impact in domains like foreign, security, and defence policies is constrained, as these areas largely operate within an intergovernmental framework. To offset these limitations, the EP dedicates significant institutional resources, utilising parliamentary diplomacy as a means to diminish information asymmetry and elevate its global standing. The institutionalised mechanisms through which the EP conducts parliamentary diplomacy comprise of Standing Committees, Delegations and Assemblies.[23] Through the creation of delegations to various parliamentary association committees, the EP actively encourages dialogue and collaboration with a diverse array of parliaments and political entities on a global scale. These delegations include inter-parliamentary assemblies, joint parliamentary committees, and parliamentary cooperation committees, acting as platforms to nurture discourse and cooperation across diverse regions and with different countries and entities.[24] Simultaneously, the EP assumes a crucial role in external relations through its standing committees, such as the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), Development and Cooperation (DEVE), and International Trade (INTA). These committees, alongside others dedicated to international issues, play an active role in fostering the EP's engagement in shaping inter-parliamentary dialogue across various levels of regional cooperation. The EP further reinforces its commitment to parliamentary diplomacy by forming delegations that participate in inter-parliamentary assemblies, joint parliamentary committees, and interactions with third countries and entities.[25]

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) is one of the institutions within the broader framework of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE PA functions as the parliamentary dimension of the OSCE, providing a forum for parliamentarians from OSCE participating States to discuss and address issues related to security, cooperation, and human rights. The OSCE PA is a key player in using parliamentary diplomacy to foster dialogue and communication among countries. Consisting of parliamentarians from 56 participating states,[26] each sending a delegation, the assembly conducts an annual session and supplementary meetings, including committee sessions. Specialised committees address political, economic, security, democracy, human rights, and humanitarian issues, engaging in discussions, producing reports, and making non-binding recommendations. This diplomatic approach is not limited to a specific region, encompassing areas like Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and South-East Europe. Its goals include enhancing regional cooperation, facilitating European integration, and addressing long standing policy issues.[27] The OSCE PA employs communication tools, such as special dialogue meetings, especially during crises like the Russia-Ukraine conflict, to foster communication between different delegations.[28]

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[23] Cristina Fasone, Fabio Longo, "The Diplomatic Role of the European Parliament's Standing Committees, Delegations and Assemblies: Insights from ACP-EU Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy,* vol. 11, no. 2/2016, pp. 161–181.

[24] *Ibidem.*

[25] *Ibidem.*

[26] At the time of writing, Russia recently announced its intention to suspend its membership in the OSCE PA.

[27] Cutler, *art. cit*.

[28] Andrea Gawrich, "A Bridge with Russia? The Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and of the Council of Europe in the Russia-Ukraine Crisis," in Jancic and Stavridis (eds.), *op. cit.,* pp. 156–173.

Emphasising parliamentary diplomacy to address conflicts, promote dialogue, and find comprehensive solutions, the OSCE PA significantly contributes to promoting cooperation for the benefit of the entire institution. Additionally, the OSCE PA distinguishes itself as a crucial Euro-regional international parliamentary institution (IPI).[29] Alongside other IPIs, the OSCE PA actively plays a role in confidence-building and cooperative security, influencing the international agenda.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) plays a central role in promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law within the Council of Europe. With representatives from 46 member states, PACE holds four annual sessions in Strasbourg, where parliamentarians engage in discussions on various topics. Specialised committees address specific issues, examining resolutions and reports submitted by members. PACE actively monitors elections, facilitates dialogue, and oversees the implementation of recommendations. Involved in legal matters, ECHR judge elections, and budgetary control, PACE serves as a forum for parliamentary diplomacy, contributing politically weighty but non-binding resolutions. It is distinct from the OSCE PA, adopting a punitive approach with a focus on supervision, as seen in its suspension of Russian parliamentarians' participation rights, contrasting the OSCE PA's emphasis on dialogue with Russian representatives. PACE's strategy is shaped by historical experiences, particularly regarding non-democratic post-Soviet countries' accession.[30] Another key distinction between PACE and OSCE PA is the composition of their parliamentary assemblies - PACE functions on the basis of national delegations' members opting to affiliate themselves to the political groups of the European political parties in the plenary, whereas OSCE PA functions on the basis of representation of national delegations. This difference allows for further politicisation of issues within PACE. Both the OSCE PA and PACE possess limited parliamentary competences and lack direct control over budgets and executives. PACE is recognized as Europe's moral conscience and wields influence through recommendations and opinions,[31] including the ability to issue non-binding recommendations to the Committee of Ministers. In contrast, the OSCE PA has fewer formal powers and a less developed institutional infrastructure. The OSCE PA concentrates on enhancing democratic institutions, discussing OSCE-related topics, assessing commitments, managing conflicts, and refining working practices. PACE engages in more frequent plenary meetings and intensive committee work compared to the OSCE PA.

Conceptual Framework

This paper will make use of the theoretical framework provided by the previous scholarly work and the real word territory by applying a state-centric approach to the analysis. The Republic of Moldova uses parliamentary diplomacy both bilaterally and multilaterally, but the bigger picture includes the efforts of Romania's parliamentary diplomacy at both levels. What follows is a mapping of the institutionalised bilateral channels of Moldovan and Romanian parliamentary diplomacy, followed by a mapping of institutionalised multilateral

[29] Cutler, *art. cit.*
[30] Gawrich, *art. cit.*, in Jancic and Stavridis (eds.), *op. cit.,* pp. 156–173.
[31] *Ibidem.*

channels of Moldovan and Romanian parliamentary diplomacy. At the bilateral level, the Moldovan Parliament has 11 standing committees,[32] 56 parliamentary friendship groups,[33] and 4 assemblies and interparliamentary cooperation committees between the Moldovan Parliament and other legislative forums.[34] At the multilateral level, the Moldovan Parliament has delegations to 12 IPIs.[35] At the bilateral level, the Romanian Parliament has 25 standing committees in the Chamber of Deputies[36] and in the Senate,[37] 11 joint committees of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate,[38] and 100 parliamentary friendship groups.[39] At the multilateral level, the Romanian Parliament has delegations to 9 IPI, but considering the Chamber of Deputies' participation in the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy[40] and the Senate's participation in the European Senates Association,[41] the final count of Romanian parliamentary participation to IPIs is 11. Due to Romania's EU membership, we will count the Romanian Members of the European Parliament's (MEP) delegation as another institutionalised multilateral parliamentary diplomacy mechanism.

Methods

The purpose of this paper, as mentioned previously, is to evaluate the mechanisms employed by Moldovan and Romanian parliamentarians in utilising parliamentary diplomacy. This is done in order to address the research question of how Moldovan and Romanian Members of Parliament (MPs) employ parliamentary diplomacy to contribute towards the Republic of Moldova's objective of joining the European Union by the year 2030. Drawing upon existing literature on parliamentary diplomacy, the European integration of Moldova, and the practical implementation of parliamentary diplomacy channels at both bilateral and multilateral levels, our focus will be directed towards analysing the international activities conducted by the Moldovan and Romanian parliamentary standing committees, as well as the parliamentary friendship groups. Additionally, we will also explore the multilateral dimension

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[32] The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, "Standing Committees," n.d., https://www.parlament.md/StructuraParlamentului/SecretariateleComisiilorpermanente/tabid/84/language/en-US/Default.aspx.

[33] The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, "Parliamentary Friendship Groups," n.d., https://www.parlament.md/Rela%C5%A3iiexterneparlamentare/Grupurideprietenie/tabid/158/language/en-US/Default.aspx.

[34] The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, "Relații Externe Parlamentare > Cooperare Multilaterală" (Parliamentary external relations – multilateral cooperation), n.d., https://www.parlament.md/Rela%C5%A3iiexterneparlamentare/Cooperaremultilateral%C4%83/tabid/309/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx.

[35] *Ibidem.*

[36] Camera Deputaților, "Comisiile Camerei Deputaților" (Chamber of Deputies Commissions), n.d., https://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.co.

[37] Comisii Permanente, *Senat.Ro*, 2024, https://senat.ro/EnumComisii.aspx?Permanenta=1.

[38] Comisii Comune. *Senat.Ro*, https://senat.ro/EnumComisii.aspx?Permanenta=1&Comuna=1.

[39] Senat.ro, "GRUPURILE PARLAMENTARE DE PRIETENIE" (Parliamentary friendship groups), https://senat.ro/grupuriprietenie.aspx.

[40] Camera Deputaților, "Delegatii Permanente La Organizatii Parlamentare Internationale" (Permanent delegations with international parliamentary organisations), accessed 2024, https://cdep.ro/pls/parlam/relatii_externe2015.adunari.

[41] Senat.Ro, "Activități Multilaterale" (Multilateral activities), accessed 2024, https://senat.ro/OrganizatiiInternationale.aspx.

of parliamentary diplomacy within institutions such as the European Parliament, the OSCE PA, and PACE.

Data collection was designed to offer a varied overview on the topic of Moldovan and Romanian parliamentary diplomacy. Therefore, official documents and interviews with Moldovan and Romanian MPs were used in writing this article. The official documents analysed were the activity reports of the Moldovan Parliament spanning from 2019 to 2022[42] and the 2023 OSCE PA Vancouver Declaration. The Members of Parliament interviewed by the author, between January 29th and February 14th, 2024, are representative for each level of institutionalisation of parliamentary diplomacy. In alphabetical order, the Moldovan and Romanian MPs interrogated are Dan Barna MP (Romania), Iulian Bulai MP (Romania), Alina Dandara MP (Republic of Moldova), Oana Murariu MP (Romania), and Marcela Nistor MP (Republic of Moldova). Dan Barna MP currently holds the Chairmanship of the Romanian Parliament's delegation to the OSCE PA, as well as the Vice Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies and the Vice Presidency of ALDE Europe. He is part of the Committee for Foreign Affairs and the Committee for European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies, as well as the Joint Committee of the Chamber of Deputies for National Security. Moreover, he is part of the PRO America group, Germany friendship group and Qatar friendship group.[43] Iulian Bulai MP holds the Presidency of the ALDE group in PACE, the Presidency of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Mass Media of the Chamber of Deputies, as well as membership in the Committee for European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies. He is part of the Lebanon friendship group, Norway friendship group, and Denmark friendship group.[44] Alina Dandara MP is a member of the Committee for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Moldovan Parliament. She is part of the Japan friendship group, Denmark friendship group, Morocco friendship group, Sweden friendship group, the Netherlands friendship group, United Kingdom friendship group, Lithuania friendship group, and Poland friendship group.[45] Oana Murariu[46] MP is Vice President of the Committee for Human Rights and Problems of the National Minorities of the Chamber of Deputies, as well as member of the Legal Committee. She is Secretary of the Luxembourg friendship group and member of the Algeria friendship group, Australia friendship group, and Armenia friendship group. Marcela Nistor MP is member of the Committee for Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sport, and Mass Media of the Moldovan Parliament. She is member of the Switzerland friendship group, Russia friendship group, Georgia friendship group, Japan friendship group, Denmark friendship group, Norway friendship group, Spain friendship group, Sweden friendship group, United Kingdom friendship group, Armenia friendship group, Belarus friendship group, Estonia friendship group, Germany friendship group, Finland friendship group, France friendship

[42] The 2023 activity report of the Moldovan Parliament is set to be published shortly before the publishing of this paper. I estimate that it will contain valuable data that will extrapolate more information valuable for the scope of this study.

[43] Ilie Dan Barna, Cdep.Ro, 2024, https://cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura2015.mp?idm=31&cam=2&leg=2020.

[44] Iulian Bulai, Cdep.Ro, 2024, https://cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura2015.mp?idm=52&cam=2&leg=2020.

[45] Dandara Alina, Parlament.Md, 2024, https://www.parlament.md/StructuraParlamentului/Deputa%C8%9Bii/tabid/87/Id/1191/actId/5/language/en-US/Default.aspx.

[46] Oana Murariu, Cdep.Ro, 2024, https://cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura2015.mp?idm=197&cam=2&leg=2020.

group, Italy friendship group, Poland friendship group, China friendship group, Romania friendship group, USA friendship group, Central Asian States friendship group, Ukraine friendship as well as member of the Moldovan delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of Francophonie.[47]

A qualitative methodology for data analysis was used for designing the research agenda, extrapolating patterns and concepts from the semi-structured interviews using thematic analysis[48] and critical discourse analysis.[49] For the official documents, a quantitative approach was used in analysing the data, using simple regression.[50] The interview questions were designed to address the experiences of the interviewees in regards to the institutionalised mechanisms of parliamentary diplomacy as follows: Dan Barna - OSCE PA, Permanent Bureau of the Chamber of Deputies, committee and friendship groups international activity; Iulian Bulai - PACE; Alina Dandara - committee and friendship groups international activity; Oana Murariu - committee international activity; Marcela Nistor - committee and friendship groups international activity.

In regard to the limitations associated with this research, it is important to note that this paper is unable to provide equal illumination on the entirety of Moldovan and Romanian parliamentary diplomacy efforts. This is due to the fact that the key stakeholders from the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee were not included in the interview process, thereby constricting the breadth of this assessment. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the five interviewees who were included in this research hail from only two political parties, namely the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) in the Republic of Moldova and the Save Romania Union (USR) in Romania. This particular selection of interviewees inherently restricts the political perspective on the Republic of Moldova's European accession efforts to the biases held by each respective political party. It should also be noted that no Romanian MPs serving in the Senate were interviewed, thus limiting the understanding of Romanian bilateral parliamentary diplomacy to solely the perspective of the Chamber of Deputies. Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge that the role played by the administrative and support apparatuses of the Moldovan and Romanian Parliaments is only briefly touched upon in this research. This is primarily due to the absence of interviews conducted with key individuals within the aforementioned organs of the parliamentary institutions. Furthermore, accurate figures for the Moldovan Parliament's international activity in 2023 were not available at the moment of writing, therefore the method of simple regression on the previous data can only indicate the trend in the Republic of Moldova's Parliament's international agency for a time period that doesn't touch the present. Alas, once the 2023 report is published, the results of the

[47] Nistor Marcela, Parlament.Md, 2024, https://www.parlament.md/StructuraParlamentului/Deputa%c8%9bii/tabid/87/Id/1051/language/en-US/Default.aspx.

[48] Ashley Castleberry, Amanda Nolen, "Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research Data: Is It as Easy as It Sounds?," *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning* vol. 10, no. 6/June 2018, pp. 807–15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019.

[49] Ruth Wodak, "Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis," *Zeitschrift für Angewandte Linguistik* vol. 36, no. 10, pp. 5-31, 2002.

[50] Roy M.Chiulli, *Simple Regression in Quantitative Analysis. An Introduction* 1st Edition, London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 190–225.

data analysis can be adjusted and correlate with the current state of facts. Last, but not least, some information within the interviews are of sensible nature and permission to use explicitly said data was not granted, but the validity of the research is not tampered by this limitation, as a holistic approach in dealing with the subjects the information refers to was considered.

Results

Prior to delving into the institutionalisation of parliamentary diplomacy in the Moldovan and Romanian Parliaments, it is noteworthy to mention that Moldovan Members of Parliament (MPs) exhibit a higher average membership in friendship groups compared to their Romanian counterparts. This discrepancy arises from the disparity in the number of parliamentarians in each respective parliament. The Moldovan Parliament houses 101 MPs, whereas the Romanian Parliament consists of 330 deputies and 136 senators, totalling 466 MPs. Even among the Moldovan MPs interviewed, Marcela Nistor and Alina Dandara, the disproportion is substantial. Marcela Nistor is involved in 22 friendship groups, whereas Alina Dandara is affiliated with only 8 friendship groups. The primary differentiating factor lies in Marcela Nistor's tenure, which began in 2021, while Alina Dandara commenced hers in 2023. Consequently, the number of friendship groups they participate in reflects the availability of positions. This variability can be attributed to the timing of their entry into these groups. Furthermore, the decision to join these friendship groups is influenced by personal interactions with individuals from foreign backgrounds. Another noteworthy practice observed among Moldovan MPs, particularly within the PAS fraction, is the effective allocation of MPs across friendship groups. Negotiations and priority-setting within the party fraction contribute to determining the optimal level of involvement in such groups. The year 2024 marks the screening phase by the European Commission, and negotiations on chapters are set to kick off in 2025. It is imperative for members of the core committees and friendship groups to stay abreast of the stages in the negotiation process. The emphasis on keeping key committee and friendship group members informed underscores the importance of their active involvement and understanding of the evolving negotiation dynamics.[51] In addition, through the European Democratic Students (EDS) platform, Alina Dandara engages with elected officials at both local and national levels from other countries. EDS functions as the student organisation affiliated with the European People's Party (EPP). This facet of her involvement represents a fusion between parliamentary diplomacy and partisan diplomacy. In essence, it highlights a parliamentarian's ability to bridge the gap between formal diplomatic interactions within parliamentary settings and more partisan, political engagements, providing a multifaceted approach to their diplomatic efforts.

The Secretariat of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova plays a crucial role in facilitating parliamentary activities by offering comprehensive technical details concerning the historical context of bilateral relations within friendship groups. This includes providing parliamentarians with insights into past agendas and decisions made by these groups. The primary objective is to ensure that each deputy is well-informed and thoroughly aware of the

[51] Alina Dandara, Author's interview with Alina Dandara MP, 2024, [Personal communication].

entire history and evolution of the friendship group. By offering this detailed information, the Secretariat provides parliamentarians with the knowledge and context necessary for effective participation and decision-making within these groups. Since 2021, the Parliament has hosted numerous foreign delegations, and the involvement of Moldovan parliamentarians in these meetings is contingent upon the standing committee to which each parliamentarian belongs.[52] In the period from 2019 to 2022, the Parliament actively participated in a wide range of international activities, which encompassed a multitude of meetings, visits to foreign countries, and discussions held online. These efforts served to foster positive relations between the Parliament and various nations. It is worth noting that the Parliament experienced particularly favourable developments in its relations with key partners, including the United States, Lithuania, Russia, Germany, Hungary, China, France, Poland, Turkey, and Kazakhstan, up until 2021. By delving into the detailed breakdown of each year, the impact of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine is clearly discernible,[53] with a notable increase in parliamentary diplomacy engagements, especially in 2022. In this specific year, the Secretariat of the Parliament orchestrated a substantial range of parliamentary diplomacy efforts with strategic partners. The Parliament engages internationally by initiating joint working groups with the legislatures of other countries. These are operationalized through the existing infrastructure, namely committees and friendship groups. The affirmative and ascendant course of collaborative affiliations has been developed with nations such as Romania, Turkey, Germany, France, the United States, Austria, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Croatia, Spain, Lithuania, Latvia, Denmark, and Sweden.

Parliamentary diplomacy is not necessarily driven by state institutions or international organisations. Acknowledging *sensu lato* parliamentary diplomacy's scope of know-how transfer for legislative tuning and soft power projection, a parliamentarian and a parliament can achieve these goals without initiating the efforts. While drafting the Cultural Fund Law, Marcela Nistor and representatives of the Ministry of Culture went on a study visit to the Baltic countries to observe the application of the respective law in that context. This visit was initiated by a Moldovan civic association that created the framework for representatives of state institutions to go to the Baltic countries, meet the homologous Estonian or Latvian authorities, and see the legislative framework regarding cultural funds in those countries.[54] In this case, the collaborative context between the parliamentarian and the executive was created by civil society, thus, civil society mediated the use of parliamentary diplomacy. Even though no Baltic parliamentary counterpart was involved, this instance is still considered an example of bilateral parliamentary diplomacy, as contributions to the Cultural Fund Law were brought forward by Marcela Nistor following the import and adaptation of the Baltic models of legislation into the Moldovan law. Soft power projection of parliaments can also be achieved with state institutions and civil society initiation and involvement. Cinema Hora Forum was the first international forum dedicated to the film industry organised in Chișinău, aimed at creating an open and

[52] Marcela Nistor, Author's interview with Marcela Nistor MP, 2024, [Personal communication].
[53] Parliament of the Republic of Moldova's Secretariat, "RAPORT de activitate al Secretariatului Parlamentului pentru anul 2022" (Activity report of the parliamentary secretariate for 2022), 2023, pp. 18–22.
[54] *Ibidem.*

constructive dialogue platform with the exchange of best practices based on innovative policies and strategies. It was organised by the Moldovan National Cinematography Centre in collaboration with multiple civil society organisations in December 2023. It was hosted by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and had multiple foreign institutional partners, with the likes of the Ministry of Culture, USAID, British Embassy in Chișinău and the Swedish Embassy in Chișinău. Even though MP involvement in the organisation was minimal,[55] Cinema Hora Forum is relevant to our study because it is an example of state institutions and civil society synergy aimed at growing the international profile of the Republic of Moldova in the film industry. Moreover, the institutional partnership of the Parliament directly impacted its agency and legitimation as an international actor in relation to other foreign executive actors.

The role played by parliamentary friendship groups in facilitating inter-state political communication within the context of bilateral parliamentary diplomacy is primarily institutionalising bilateral parliamentary diplomacy between two states. Despite their potential, Marcela Nistor notes that these groups are not fully utilised, suggesting that their complete effectiveness remains untapped. Marcela Nistor emphasises that these groups provide a comprehensive framework for strategic communication, serving as an essential platform for political dialogue between states. Recognizing their considerable potential in maximising international contacts, she underscores their profound importance as an apt framework for parliamentarians to enrich their global networks and engage in fruitful collaborations. Marcela Nistor views parliamentary friendship groups as an invaluable strategic framework for lawmakers to advance their agendas effectively by strategically developing international contacts. To illustrate this perspective, Marcela Nistor cites her collaboration with the France-Moldova friendship group, which played a pivotal role in establishing contact with a prominent French state agency managing cultural vouchers in order to transfer know-how for her legislative project. This practical cooperation serves as a concrete example of how bilateral parliamentary diplomacy, through active involvement in friendship groups, can significantly contribute to the transfer of knowledge and best practices, fostering cultural exchange and legislative development. The schedule for a foreign parliamentary delegation encompasses firstly a meeting with the President of the Moldovan Parliament Igor Grosu, followed by a meeting with members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and European Integration, concluding with a meeting with members of the friendship group. Moldovan MPs adopt a straightforward approach in these meetings, with a notable focus on security. Moldovan representatives seek advice or financial support. The specific strengths of each country are taken into account, especially in sectors such as agriculture or justice, and guidance is requested regarding European Union accession. Concurrently, friendship groups are utilised by Romanian MPs to perpetuate and uphold the rhetoric that supports the accession of Moldova to the European Union (EU) on every possible occasion.[56]

Despite their primary function of reviewing legislative proposals within a legislative body, standing committees also play a significant international role, which is particularly

[55] *Ibidem.*
[56] Dan Barna in *ibidem.*

evident in the case of the Republic of Moldova and Romania, where the international functions of their parliamentary standing committees are similar up to a certain point. The international activities of parliamentary standing committees are fundamentally rooted in the promotion of the transfer of good practices and know-how among parliamentarians, specifically in relation to the unique characteristics of the standing committee. This transfer of good practices and know-how is crucial for enhancing the legislative processes and outcomes of parliamentary bodies, as it allows for the exchange of innovative ideas and effective approaches to addressing complex policy issues. By leveraging the expertise and experiences of other countries, standing committees can broaden their perspectives and develop more comprehensive and informed legislative proposals. However, Romania's membership in the European Union elevates its parliamentary standing committees to the status of norm entrepreneurs. An example of the international role of parliamentary standing committees can be observed in the involvement of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies' Legal Committee in bilateral parliamentary diplomacy between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The Romanian Legal Committee assumes a crucial role in facilitating legal cooperation and the exchange of legislative best practices between the two countries. This proactive involvement was evident when an official delegation from the Romanian Legal Committee visited the Republic of Moldova for a joint session with its Moldovan counterpart committee in March 2023.[57] During this joint session, the Legal Committee engaged in constructive dialogue with its Moldovan counterparts, exchanging insights and experiences on legislative reforms and legal frameworks, as well as addressing key issues of the Moldovan legal and judicial system, such as corruption and the influence of oligarchs. This exchange of knowledge and expertise helps both countries in their efforts to strengthen the rule of law, enhance the effectiveness of their legislative processes, and ensure the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Still on the topic of the international role of standing committees, one noteworthy parliamentary diplomacy practice following the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine is United4Moldova (U4M), which was the initiative of the Committee for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Moldovan Parliament. In November 2023, the Presidents of the Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of the 27 EU Member States' national parliaments were invited to Chișinău to the assembly, involving over 100 parliamentarians. President Maia Sandu and President of the Moldovan Parliament Igor Grosu presented arguments and underscored the necessity for the Republic of Moldova to receive European support in its positioning and efforts to align with the European Union. The popular message was conveyed during the "European Moldova" Assembly on May 21st, 2023, endorsed by EP President Roberta Metsola and President Maia Sandu. Roberta Metsola explicitly stated that *Moldova is the European Union, and the European Union is Moldova*. The fusion of a popular message with political endeavours characterised U4M's role in disseminating this message among a broader audience of parliamentarians. The concept of this initiative was borrowed from Lithuania, which had established a parliamentary platform to support Ukraine.[58] The objective

[57] Oana Murariu, Author's interview with Oana Murariu MP, 2024 [Personal communication].
[58] Alina Dandara, Author's interview with Alina Dandara MP, 2024 [Personal communication].

of this initiative was to promote the pro-European political message of the Republic of Moldova in the parliaments of EU Member States. It served as a tool to facilitate negotiations with the EU Council and also facilitated an exchange of practices. In March of 2022, the Lithuanians created the platform "United4Ukraine" with the recognition that Moldova deserved individual attention rather than being grouped together with Ukraine. Lithuania, motivated by historical and security reasons, is determined to take all necessary steps to reduce Russian influence in the region. The relationship between Moldova and Lithuania is especially noteworthy as Moldova was the first country to acknowledge and support Lithuania's independence in the year 1991. Lithuania acts as a norm entrepreneur in the realms of European integration and security, and it effectively utilises parliamentary diplomacy channels to export its knowledge and project soft power.

At the European level, parliamentary diplomacy for the European accession of the Republic of Moldova is instrumentalised twofold. Once, through the Romanian MEPs who use their capacity to advocate for Moldova's EU path[59] within the European Parliament, and through the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee. Upgraded from the status of Parliamentary Cooperation Committee in 2015, the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee consists of delegations of the European Parliament and of the Moldovan Parliament. Currently, the EP delegation is chaired by the Romanian MEP Siegfried Mureșan (EPP/PNL), while the Moldovan delegation lacks a formal chairmanship, the lead being taken by the two vice presidents Doina Gherman MP and Vasile Bolea MP.[60] The most recent EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee meeting took place in November 2023, in Chișinău. The Committee, co-chaired by Siegfried Mureșan and Mihail Popşoi, discussed various aspects of Moldova's EU candidate status, including justice reform, security, and the economic situation. A series of statements and recommendations on Moldova's EU membership were discussed, including justice reform, and the country's security and economic challenges. The Committee praised Moldova's efforts, called for positive decisions from the European Council in regards with opening negotiations for EU membership, and outlined steps for accession negotiations, justice reform, and addressing Russia's hybrid warfare. Other topics include financial support, trade liberalisation, modernising Moldova's payment system, and Moldova's participation in EU programmes.[61] Another contribution of Siegfried Mureșan in his capacity as both Romanian MEP and Chair of the EP's delegation to the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee is Resolution TA (2023)0357, proposed by the PPE Group and voted by the EP on October 5th, 2023. It urges the initiation of accession negotiations for the Republic of Moldova with the European Union by the conclusion of 2023. During his

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[59] European Parliament, "Taking Stock of Moldova's Path to the EU," TA (2023)0357, 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0357_EN.pdf.

[60] From 2019 to 2024, Mihai Popșoi served as the chair of the Moldovan delegation to the EU Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee. He resigned from his role as a Member of Parliament after Nicu Popescu stepped down as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mihai Popșoi assumed the position previously held by Nicu Popescu on January 29th, 2024.

[61] EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee, "FINAL STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS pursuant to Article 441(3) of the Association Agreement," 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/279075/FINAL%20statement%2014th%20EU-Moldova%20PAC%2029112023.pdf.

plenary address, Siegfried Mureșan highlighted the Moldovan citizens' aspiration for a democratic and free society, emphasising that Moldova will eventually join the European Union. The resolution put forth various measures to assist Moldova, encompassing heightened financial and technical support to tackle challenges stemming from the conflict in Ukraine and to advance the European integration process. Additionally, it recommended reallocating EU funds initially allocated for Ukraine to Moldova, with the goal of supporting reforms and economic development in the country. These measures are perceived as efforts to streamline entry into the European market, entice foreign investments, generate employment opportunities, and enhance the quality standards of Moldovan products to align with European norms.[62]

Still on the European level, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) acts as another stage for using parliamentary diplomacy in pushing the agenda of the Republic of Moldova's efforts to democratise and Europeanise. During the last year, there have been a couple of resolutions addressing Moldova and its strategic objectives. Resolution 2484 (2023), voted in January 2023, focuses on Moldova's commitment to the Council of Europe, covering political developments, reforms, and challenges. It highlights President Maia Sandu's election, parliamentary majority formation, and the ruling party's responsibility for democracy, rule of law, and human rights. The resolution emphasises judiciary and anti-corruption reforms, calling for inclusive processes. It addresses the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, urging support from Council of Europe states for humanitarian issues. Security challenges, economic hardships, and Moldova's EU candidate status are discussed, with the EU negotiation process seen as driving legal and democratic reforms. Progress in gender equality, the Istanbul Convention, media freedom, minority rights, and the Transnistrian region question is acknowledged. The resolution concludes with a call for assistance, Moldova's adherence to Council of Europe standards, and an intention to monitor the situation.[63] Resolution 2534 (2024), voted in January 2024, acknowledges Moldova's commitment to European integration and reforms, particularly in the judiciary and anti-corruption efforts. It stresses the need for implementing reforms in accordance with legal provisions and Council of Europe standards, emphasising an inclusive bipartisan consultation process. The resolution also addresses concerns about amendments to electoral legislation and urges Moldova to follow recommendations from the Venice Commission. It notes interference in the electoral process and calls for strict limitations on banning members from unconstitutional parties, with judicial review. This reflects the progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure.[64] Within PACE, Moldovan and Romanian use of parliamentary diplomacy in pushing the agenda of the Republic of Moldova's efforts to democratise and Europeanise largely consist of utilising the

[62] *Ibidem.*

[63] The Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by the Republic of Moldova, "Resolution 2484 (2023)," Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2023, https://pace.coe.int/pdf/4653ca73c7b6eae66fd026d2b596dd1d2241f6dca1a8b4fc767f5b225b7f0680/res.%202484.pdf.

[64] Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "The Progress of the Assembly's Monitoring Procedure," (January-December 2023), 2534 (2024), https://pace.coe.int/pdf/6e97f743ee3f08a99e7bd858a16ce5b58214016e627cb294d36701d0a1c156fa/res.%202534.pdf.

other Council of Europe (CoE) organs, such as Greco and the Venice Commission.[65] Given the organisation of PACE members on political groups, irrespective of their national delegation, political positioning drives forward eventual endeavours in addressing issues within CoE Member States.

The last IPI analysed is the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), where Moldovan and Romanian MP acted jointly by using parliamentary diplomacy successfully to successfully promote the goals assumed by the Republic of Moldova in its foreign affairs. At the OSCE 2023 Annual Session in June and July 2023, held in Vancouver, Canada, the Moldovan and Romanian delegations successfully sponsored a resolution on the Republic of Moldova that was included in the Vancouver Declaration. This resolution focuses on the Republic of Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict, acknowledging the impact on Moldova from Russian aggression, applauding its solidarity with Ukraine, and recognizes its commitment to reforms. The resolution welcomes Moldova's EU candidate status and underscores the importance of democratic reforms. It addresses the Transnistrian conflict, emphasising the need for a peaceful solution while supporting economic development and regional examples like Găgăuzia. The resolution calls for Russian troop withdrawal from the Eastern bank of the Nistru river, transparency in removing ammunition, and suggests transforming the peacekeeping operation into a multilateral civilian mission.[66] Discussions for amassing support for the resolution commenced during the 2023 winter meeting of the OSCE PA in Vienna. Key priorities included the imperative to keep the subject on the public agenda and explore avenues to sustain its relevance within the diplomatic parliamentary framework of the Eastern European region. The objective was to garner political support through a plenary-adopted resolution, necessitating backing from multiple states. Informal discussions spanning five months, from Vienna to Vancouver, involved states with the likes of the United States, UK, France, Poland, the Baltic States and Ukraine, engaging in lobbying efforts through text and messages with parliamentarians from various countries. Support had been secured prior to submitting the resolution to the specialised committee, resulting in a favourable vote both in the committee and the plenary. The resolution's outcome paved the way for opening of negotiations with the EU in December. The persistent presence of the topic on the agenda contributed to the internationalisation of Moldova's foreign policy objective.[67] Consistency in conveying the message at the international level emerged as a method for the Republic of Moldova to assert its position on the global stage, with parliamentary diplomacy serving as the medium for such expression. Unlike PACE, where political ideologies define the framework of the Assembly, parliamentary delegations to OSCE PA act according to the national interest. In the Romanian case, Costel Dunava (PSD) serves as the vice-chair of the Committee on Security and Foreign Policy of the OSCE PA, and the assumption that ideological and domestic political fault lines impact the efficiency of

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[65] Iulian Bulai, Author's interview with Iulian Bulai MP, 2024, [Personal communication].

[66] OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, "Resolution on the Republic of Moldova," 2023), https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/annual-sessions/2023-vancouver/declaration-29/4744-vancouver-declaration-eng/file.

[67] Dan Barna, Author's interview with Dan Barna MP, 2024, [Personal communication].

Romanian parliamentary diplomacy within OSCE PA does not stand; since Dan Barna (USR) has been leading the Romanian parliamentary delegation to OSCE PA, the positions adopted have mirrored Romania's foreign policy, such as on EU, NATO, the pro-European path of the Republic of Moldova and of Ukraine.[68]

Results

The study aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of parliamentary diplomacy in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. It seeks to shed light on the various patterns and variations that exist among parliamentarians in these two countries. Moreover, the study emphasises the critical role played by the Secretariat of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova in adapting to geopolitical events and actively engaging in diplomatic activities. This role is of utmost strategic importance, as it helps to enhance Moldova's international standing. Furthermore, the study recognises the significant contributions made by civil society and state institutions in Moldova, which not only facilitate the transfer of knowledge but also exert soft power. These contributions are instrumental in bolstering Moldova's international reputation and influence. Moreover, they play a crucial role in strengthening the country's relations with other nations and organisations. In particular, bilateral parliamentary diplomacy and the legislative processes carried out within parliamentary friendship groups and standing committees are identified as having immense potential in enhancing Moldova's acquisition of the EU acquis and fostering closer ties with strategic partners. It is worth mentioning that certain initiatives, such as United4Moldova, have proved to be highly beneficial in advancing Moldova's European accession. Additionally, the active involvement of Romanian Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee have played a pivotal role in this regard. These actors have effectively contributed to the process of Moldova's integration into the European Union. Lastly, the study highlights the successful utilisation of parliamentary diplomacy within the framework of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. This international organisation has provided a conducive platform for Moldovan and Romanian parliamentarians to engage in diplomatic activities and foster cooperation with their counterparts from other participating states. This has further enhanced Moldova's diplomatic presence and influence within the international community.

Discussions

This study presents a plethora of valuable insights that can greatly benefit parliamentarians who are actively involved in parliamentary diplomacy activities, particularly within the Republic of Moldova and Romania. One key theme that stands out is the significance of adapting strategically to geopolitical events, as exemplified by the proactive approach adopted by the Secretariat. Parliamentarians can derive valuable lessons from this, learning how to develop adaptive strategies and customise their diplomatic engagements in order to effectively respond to the ever-evolving global situations. Furthermore, the study stresses the

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[68] *Ibidem.*

collaborative nature of parliamentary diplomacy, urging parliamentarians to actively engage with civil society, transfer knowledge, and participate in initiatives aimed at projecting soft power, all of which contribute towards enhancing their countries' positive international image. The exploration of untapped potential within parliamentary friendship groups emerges as a noteworthy finding, as it empowers parliamentarians to strategically engage in these groups, thus fostering bilateral diplomacy and advocating for their respective national interests on the global stage. Another significant aspect highlighted by this study is the norm entrepreneurial role played by standing committees, which empowers parliamentarians to actively contribute to legislative processes that are aligned with global standards. Moreover, the study advocates for a versatile approach in parliamentary diplomacy, drawing inspiration from initiatives such as United4Moldova, and encouraging parliamentarians to explore various avenues through which they can effectively disseminate key messages and proactively address diplomatic challenges. The study also provides valuable insights into European accession strategies, including the impactful role played by Romanian MEPs and the significance of the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee, which can serve as a valuable guide for parliamentarians as they navigate the complex path towards European integration. Finally, the study underscores the success achieved through collaborative efforts within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, urging parliamentarians to draw inspiration from this example and enhance their effectiveness in international platforms.

This study contributes to the evolving literature on parliamentary diplomacy by providing nuanced insights and expanding the understanding of this field, particularly within the Moldovan and Romanian contexts. It recognizes the contextual specificity that shapes parliamentary diplomacy, acknowledging the influence of regional and national dynamics. Furthermore, this research delves into the often-overlooked realm of parliamentary friendship groups, offering a comprehensive exploration of their untapped potential as strategic platforms for fostering bilateral relations. It sheds light on the norm entrepreneurial role played by standing committees, emphasising their active participation in legislative processes aligned with global standards. The findings of this research also challenge conventional views by highlighting the versatility of parliamentary diplomacy through dynamic examples like United4Moldova. This showcases the pressing need for flexible and multifaceted approaches in diplomatic practices. Additionally, this study provides insights into the strategies employed in European accession efforts, making contributions to the existing literature focused on parliamentary diplomacy within the context of European integration. Lastly, it emphasises the inherently collaborative nature of diplomacy in international platforms, challenging the widely held notion of individualised parliamentary efforts and underscoring the importance of collective endeavours for effective parliamentary diplomacy engagement. Together, these findings diversify the existing body of literature, offering a more nuanced understanding of parliamentary diplomacy.

Conclusion

Parliamentary diplomacy demonstrates itself as an essential instrument in the diplomatic arsenal of a contemporary state. The utilisation of its adaptable and detailed human

resources conveys a diverse range of positive outcomes within a country's foreign policy domain. Despite being a less familiar practice to the general public, its results significantly influence a nation's position on the global stage. Through an examination of existing literature on parliamentary diplomacy and the Moldovan European accession, a conceptual framework was developed to explore the dual institutionalisation of parliamentary diplomacy. This framework was then scrutinised using a collection of data, including interviews with Moldovan and Romanian Members of Parliament, as well as official documents. The key findings of this study delve into the correlation between parliamentary diplomacy and strategic adaptation to geopolitical events, the enhancement of soft power projection, the optimization of parliamentary friendship group activities, the international norm entrepreneurship of parliamentary standing committees, the strategic versatility in pursuing national foreign policy objectives, and the strategic utilisation of international parliamentary institutions' platforms to advance a national agenda.

The paper aims to exert influence by offering a comprehensive manual for parliamentarians engaged in diplomatic endeavours, with a specific focus on the contexts of the Republic of Moldova and Romania. The discoveries provide directions on policy and strategic matters, enabling policymakers to make well-informed choices and enhance their diplomatic approaches. Furthermore, the study sheds light on adaptive strategies employed by the Secretariat of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, presenting lessons that can foster similar practices in parliamentary institutions worldwide, promoting resilience and responsiveness to dynamic global situations. The emphasis on enhancing international standing through collaborative parliamentary diplomacy presents actionable measures for positively shaping countries' images, thereby contributing to improved international relations. Additionally, the identification of untapped potential within parliamentary friendship groups suggests avenues for optimising diplomatic platforms, leading to increased collaboration, and strengthened relations among nations. The recognition of the entrepreneurial role of standing committees underscores the significance of legislative processes in alignment with global standards, inspiring parliamentarians to contribute to informed decision-making and compliance with international norms. The promotion of a versatile approach in parliamentary diplomacy encourages exploration of various avenues, inspiring policymakers to address complex diplomatic challenges with such responses. Insights into successful European integration strategies and collaborative efforts within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly offer a pertinent example, serving as a model for fostering cooperation in international platforms and inspiring global engagement in collaborative endeavours to address common challenges and advance shared objectives.

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Saturation Warfare: A Soviet Doctrine Reinvented in the Black Sea Region

Vlad Fărcaș

Abstract. Since the Second World War, one thing was clear to the Soviet soldier: advance regardless of losses. Subsequently, this approach became deeply rooted in how the Ground Forces of the USSR prepared for a potential conflict with the West. Tens of thousands of cheap armoured vehicles had to be built, which could ensure the advance of the Red Army simply because no matter how many were destroyed, dozens more would instantly take their place, and Western armies would not be able to resist, either due to their own losses or a lack of ammunition. The Soviet Navy adopted the same mentality, believing that a large number of missiles could saturate the maritime capabilities of adversaries.

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that the Soviet strategy of saturating the enemy's capabilities is still relevant, albeit with a different mode of application. Combining relatively low cost with a long range of action, the most impactful weapon in the Black Sea conflict is the drone. Many experts argue that this is an artillery war, but they fail to mention that artillery owes its current performance to reconnaissance drones.

Today, the Black Sea region represents the area where tactics are being tested that will significantly influence conflicts worldwide. There are many aspects that military strategists need to reconsider, from the insufficient number of short-range anti- air systems to the cost-effectiveness of intercepting a $20,000 drone with a million- dollar missile, to finding a way to defend warships against coordinated attacks by dozens of maritime drones.

Keywords: war in Ukraine, saturation warfare, strategy, Black Sea Region

A Small Region With A Pivotal Role for the Future

A discussion about the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood is impossible without analysing how the war in Ukraine has affected this region and the ripple effects of the conflict that ultimately created shockwaves on a global scale. The way global supply chains have been redrawn, the resurgence of arms race in Europe after over 30 years since the fall of the USSR, and the need for economies to reassess their priorities are just some of the macro-level events that have fundamentally changed since February 2022.

The concern is not necessarily tied to the observable aspects that have shifted, but rather should arise when it comes to things that cannot be quantifiably measured at the moment. This category of issues is likely to become clear only in the coming decades. Legitimate questions, such as whether the war in Ukraine a precursor to a much larger conflagration is or what the future holds for the EU and NATO, given the significant strains in their unity at various points in the last two years, should seriously concern the Western population accustomed to a relatively comfortable and peaceful life in this century.

It is important to understand that the war in Ukraine affects other countries in the Black Sea region to varying degrees, both economically and politically. Moldova, as well as the states in the Caucasus, are feeling the full effects of the war. On one hand, Chișinău had significant issues with energy prices and faced destabilizing actions sponsored by the Kremlin. On the

other hand, the situation in the Caucasus is even more complex. The Georgian government seems to have a more pro-Russian stance, which is not favourable for Georgia's European ambitions. Meanwhile, there is no visible long-lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan as long as the regional power broker, Russia, has shifted its focus to the Ukrainian front, allowing Baku to expand its territory at the expense of the Armenians, a move strongly supported by Ankara.

Realistically, it is challenging to predict the duration of the conflict in Ukraine at this moment. It could potentially follow a trajectory similar to the Korean Peninsula conflict, where the two opposed states have yet to formally sign a peace treaty and remain effectively in a frozen conflict.

From an economic and political point of view, the world has already undergone a fundamental change, but the military implications of the current situation in the Black Sea region need to be thoroughly analysed. This is necessary because ensuring security should be the primary objective of every state, and this necessitates learning everything from the challenges faced by others so that the preparedness of their own forces can be as effective as possible.

Waging War in the Third Millennium

"The battlefield is a scene of constant chaos. The winner will be the one who controls that chaos, both his own and the enemies." is a quote often attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte. This idea couldn't be more relevant given the way the war in Ukraine is unfolding. The frontlines no longer have a solid character but rather a diffuse one, in which the ability to disrupt the enemy's organisation, planning, and supply routes behind their own lines plays a decisive strategic role. While many consider this a static trench warfare, it's essential to understand that the nature of this conflict is no longer primarily terrestrial. The fact that the Russian army has lost tens of thousands of vehicles and had hundreds of thousands of casualties indicates that the Soviet doctrine approach, which saw ground warfare as the decisive axis for winning a conflict, is no longer applicable. At least not without the support of major support elements that can decisively tip the balance.

Traditional artillery has demonstrated its strategic significance for both factions. However, due to equipment deterioration and the considerable demand for ammunition (which exceeds current production capacities), the importance of this weapon category has gradually waned. Ammunition reserves have been allocated sparingly across the entire front as a result. Another notable asset, the rocket-based artillery known as Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), is predominantly employed to target distant objectives deemed strategically important. Classical aviation actions are relatively limited, given that military aircraft and helicopters are expensive equipment with long production times, and their losses have a high probability due to the large number of anti-aircraft systems present on the front. Therefore, neither side currently possesses air supremacy.

Electronic warfare equipment plays a significant role in this conflict, with Russia having invested significant resources in creating dedicated military units in this branch. Ukraine has recognized the benefits of this category of weapons and has made serious efforts

to improve its capabilities in this field. At the beginning of the war, Russia initially lagged in drone technology, which likely served as a primary factor hindering the Russian army's ability to advance as per the initial invasion strategy. The deficiency in advanced reconnaissance, particularly for detecting ambushes, and the absence of precise location support for artillery to effectively execute counter-battery fire significantly contributed to the stalemate in Russian armoured offensives. The Ukrainian side was more attentive to the lessons of the 2020 conflict in the Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan, giving them a significant advantage in countering Russian troop actions. Meanwhile, drones have become even more critical, as they can supplement the role of artillery and classical aviation capabilities. Ukraine has lost nearly 10,000 drones per month in the summer of 2023,[1] so it's almost certain that the number of drones deployed on the front exceeds hundreds of thousands.

The Russians have closed the initial drone gap and started using drones in a reinterpretation of the military strategic principles of the Soviet era. The emphasis should be on saturating the enemy's defence capabilities using the most cost-effective means. In this case, quantity can be seen as quality. The intensive use of kamikaze drones, the most well-known being the Shahed-136,[2] estimated at approximately 20,000 US dollars, primarily aims to exhaust the expensive ammunition of Western-made anti-aircraft equipment, which has a high production duration and cost. In this case, the Russian approach prevails economically. The Ukrainians have been quite inventive in using commercial drones worth a few hundred dollars to attach explosives and disable multi-million-dollar armoured vehicles or take out dozens of soldiers with only one cheap device. Furthermore, the Ukrainians have expanded their capabilities by developing maritime drones, a sector in which Russia has not been involved at all, but this could change in the future, posing new security dilemmas for the eastern flank of the Euro-Atlantic community. The Russian army learns slowly but still learns, as was the case with aerial drones at the beginning of the war, a fundamental capability that was virtually non-existent at the tactical level of groups, platoons, or companies in February 2022.

The Speed of Change

The war between Russia and Ukraine represents the first major conflict of this century in which adversaries with similar capabilities confront each other on the battlefield, with access to most types of military equipment currently available. Many may disagree with this, considering Russia to be vastly superior, as it was previously considered a top-three global military power before the conflict.

Prior to the outbreak of the conflict, many analysts highlighted the Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs) as evidence of the Russian Army's innovative approach. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that the BTGs themselves originated from experiments conducted in the 1980s. What largely escaped observers' attention was the considerable challenge confronting BTG

[1] Jack Watling, Nick Reynolds, "Meatgrinder: Russian Tactics in the Second Year of Its Invasion of Ukraine," *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*, Special Report, May 19, 2023, p. 18.
[2] Can Kasapoğlu, "A Game of Drones in the Russia-Ukraine War," *Hudson Institute*, February 28, 2024, https://www.hudson.org/ukraine-military-situation-report-august-9-can-kasapoglu.

commanders, who were responsible for coordinating more than eleven units and potentially up to fifteen additional support units directly attached to them.[3]

In 2023, Russian infantry tactics evolved from their previous strategy of employing uniform Battalion Tactical Groups as combined arms units to a new method that categorizes troops into specific functions within the ranks. This new approach divides infantry into four distinct categories: line, assault, specialized, and disposable troops, which are then organised into purpose-driven groupings.[4] Line infantry mainly engage in ground holding and defensive operations, while disposable infantry are responsible for continuous skirmishing. Their primary objectives are to identify Ukrainian firing positions, which are subsequently targeted by specialized infantry. In addition, disposable troops also seek out weaknesses in Ukrainian defences to be prioritized for assault. One significant challenge faced by Russian infantry units is their consistently low morale, which negatively impacts unit cohesion and cooperation between units.

It is worth mentioning that Ukraine held the status of being the most highly militarized republic within the former USSR, potentially placing it at the forefront of any NATO conflict. With an army exceeding a million personnel and possessing a significant portion of the Soviet military hardware, Ukraine's substantial arms industry, initially developed to support the former USSR's forces, has remained operational to a considerable extent despite financial constraints and corruption. This industry has continued to play a pivotal role in the ongoing war effort against the Russian forces. Presently, Ukraine operates within a wartime economy, with all resources directed toward the primary goal of survival. In contrast, war has not yet become the sole priority in Russia. Life in many politically significant areas, particularly Moscow and St. Petersburg, carries on somewhat as usual despite existing shortages and challenges. Considering the robust military and financial backing from the states of the Euro-Atlantic Community (and others), it can be said that the Russian Federation and Ukraine are in a state of relative power equilibrium, as evidenced by the slow pace at which most sections of the frontlines have shifted in recent months.

The current balance of forces did not emerge at the outset of the conflict. With significant stocks of artillery ammunition (an estimated 10 million shells used in the first year of the war), the Russians opted for extensive utilization, prompting Ukrainian forces to retreat following intense but economically inefficient artillery barrages. At one point, the Russians were expending over 50,000 shells daily.[5] As ammunition stocks dwindled, the focus shifted toward the precision rather than the sheer quantity of strikes, a characteristic rooted in the mindset of Russian military leadership from the Soviet era. This marks a pivotal moment in Russian military doctrine, as the necessity for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities has prompted a re-evaluation of the approach to drone usage, particularly in terms of required quantities of such equipment.

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[3] T. X. Hammes, "Implications of the Russo-Ukraine War for the Future of Ground Warfare," Atlantic Council, *Scowcroft Centre for Strategy and Security*, April 2023, p. 1.
[4] Watling, Reynolds, *art. cit.*, pp. 3-4.
[5] *Ibidem,* p. 11.

Before the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Russian military had developed a diverse fleet of UAVs. Most of these systems were tailored for ISR, with UCAVs being produced at a slower rate due to their more expensive designs. These drones primarily serve the role of offering ISR and assessing battle damage for Russian ground forces units. Some of the Russian platforms that fulfil this role[6] are Eleron-3, Orlan-30, Takhion, Orlan-10, Granat and the Zala UAVs. As of December 2022, despite their reduced numbers, the Orlan-10, which has a range of up to 120 kilometres, continued to provide targeting support for Russian artillery, mortars and MLRS units. While the Orlan-10 primarily serves as an ISR platform and is basic and cost-effective, it can be modified to carry a limited combat payload.

To defend its 1300-kilometer front, Ukraine had to quickly deploy versatile weaponry and reconnaissance capabilities. Low-cost commercial drones quickly filled this need and have played a crucial role in impeding Russia's progress. While military operations have long utilized aerial drones, Ukraine has undertaken an extensive and unprecedented use of commercial drones, rapidly adapting them for battlefield purposes. In addition to their typical reconnaissance function, Ukraine has employed these drones for guiding artillery fire and launching attacks, either by delivering munitions or directing them at enemy targets. Commercial drones are disposable, with their cost comparable to that of a small ammunition supply. Similar to expended ammunition, the expectation of losing a small drone is incorporated into its mission, allowing military forces to use them freely on the front lines without hesitation.

After the initial failed assault, the Russian military launched a second major offensive in Ukraine, characterized by significant changes in their approach. Ground units notably started incorporating commercial drones into their tactics and procedures. Observing the significant impact of these drones when employed against them, Russia adopted Ukraine's strategy of integrating military and commercial UAVs. While Russian officials had previously acknowledged drones as a vital force multiplier and had even considered incorporating quadcopters before the war, it took the actual conflict for Russian doctrine to align with their previous statements.

Drones have effectively increased battlefield transparency, reducing the time needed from detection to destruction. These unmanned systems have greatly improved the accuracy of strikes.

A New Kind of Naval Power

Another chapter set to undergo profound changes in the future, considering the evolving military landscape in the Black Sea region, is the domain of maritime commercial transport. According to the UN data, maritime transportation forms the bedrock of global trade and the global economy, with sea transport accounting for over 80% of the total volume of international trade in goods. This percentage is even more significant for many developing nations. The

[6] Jeffrey A. Edmonds, Samuel Bendett, "Russia's Use of Uncrewed Systems in Ukraine," CNA Corporation, Russia Studies Programme, March 2023, pp. 10-12.

financial costs associated with this sector could substantially rise due to the likely need for increased resources to ensure the security of vessels in light of emerging threats.

Notably, a standout feature in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is the utilization of maritime drones. While this type of weaponry has been used before, such as by Houthi rebels backed by Iranian technology, it hasn't been employed to the extent witnessed in the Black Sea. With a production cost of just a few hundred thousand dollars per unit, both surface and underwater drones have inflicted significant damages, amounting to hundreds of millions, on the Russian Navy.[7] The widespread adoption of these drones on a global scale will further complicate the geopolitical landscape.

On August 24, 2023, during the Independence Day celebrations, President Zelensky commended a unique unit within the Ukrainian Navy. The 385th Separate Brigade[8] is equipped with a variety of "Special-Purpose Naval Unmanned Systems" representing a clear indicator of the transformative shifts occurring in modern warfare. This dedicated unit in the Ukrainian Army showcases the rapid evolution of naval tactics that barely existed just two years ago.

Russia's conventional naval supremacy had long posed a substantial threat to Ukraine, with early successes on the sea. In response, Ukraine initially relied on traditional naval armaments to counter Russian naval power, successfully targeting the Russian flagship Moskva[9] in April 2022 using anti-ship cruise missiles. Subsequently, Ukraine turned to unorthodox surface and sub-surface naval vessels to both attack and deter Russian forces. The underlying technology used was not particularly advanced, with some models appearing to be essentially jet skis loaded with explosives and communication devices, all at a relatively low cost of approximately 200,000 US dollars.

Shortly after the Moskva's sinking, Ukraine began incorporating naval drones into its operations more regularly. In October 2022, a significant strike was carried out on a vital asset of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, the frigate Admiral Makarov, which had assumed the flagship position following the Moskva incident. Although the frigate survived the audacious attack, it suffered significant damage to its hull and radar system.

Despite its limited naval capabilities, Ukraine managed to neutralize five Russian Navy warships, including a Kilo-class submarine.[10] More recently, Ukrainian forces inflicted damage on a Russian amphibious landing ship and a Russian fuel tanker using naval drones.

Underwater drones pose an even greater threat to Russian Black Sea Fleet assets since they remain undetectable by the Russian surveillance system. In May 2023, the Toloka TK-

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[7] Ilya Volzhsky, "Drones of the High Seas. Ukrainian Sea Drones: What Are They and How Can They Change the Course of the War?," *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, August 10, 2023, https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/08/10/drones-of-high-seas-en.

[8] H. I. Sutton, "World's First Specialized Explosive Naval Drone Unit Formed In Ukraine," *Naval News (blog),* August 31, 2023, https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2023/08/worlds-first-specialized-explosive-naval-drone-unit-formed-in-ukraine/.

[9] Grace Jones, Janet Egan, Eric Rosenbach, "Advancing in Adversity: Ukraine's Battlefield Technologies and Lessons for the U.S.," Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, July 31, 2023, https://www.belfercentre.org /publication/advancing-adversity-ukraines-battlefield-technologies-and-lessons-us.

[10] Ritu Sharma, "From Hypersonic Missiles To Stealth UUVs – 5 Battlefield Tech That Have Emerged From Ukraine-Russia War," *Latest Asian, Middle-East, EurAsian, Indian News (blog)*, October 15, 2023, https://www.eurasiantimes.com/from-hypersonic-missiles-to-stealth-uuvs-5-battlefield-tech-that/.

150 UUV was unveiled at a government tech cluster. The Toloka TK-150 is a very compact drone, measuring just 2.5 meters in length. Additionally, another model of UUV named Marichka is significantly larger than the Toloka TK-150, measuring 6 meters in length and 1 meter in diameter.[11]

It remains to be seen whether the Russians will follow a similar path as the Ukrainians, who for example were the first to adopt commercial drones and develop their own maritime drones. These could potentially be used to disrupt the global supply chains, starting with commercial vessels in the Black Sea. If there is no restraint from the Russian military when it comes to using aerial drones in NATO airspace (the case of Romania), it's unlikely that a Ukrainian ship laden with valuable cargo won't become an attractive target at some point. Time will reveal the extent of the challenges posed by this new capability, but one thing is certain – it represents an extremely serious threat to global security and the global economy.

Today by the Hundreds, Tomorrow by the Thousands

The impact of drones on the battlefield (whether it be on land, in the air or at sea) is obvious, but it is also crucial to emphasize how certain infrastructure targets related to vital economic sectors for a nation's development are affected. In the first year of the war, Russian drones targeted energy installations in Ukraine, likely with the aim of demoralizing the civilian population and compelling Ukrainian authorities to allocate significant resources for the protection and repair of this type of infrastructure.

The Russian military faced criticism for these actions, as public opinion held that these energy production facilities did not have direct military value. However, it should be noted that this approach had indirect military implications for the Ukrainian side, as they were forced to deploy numerous anti-aircraft systems to protect critical energy infrastructure. This allocation of resources essentially resulted in a disadvantage for the Ukrainian side, as these systems were effectively taken away from the frontlines.

With the agreement for the free passage of Ukrainian grain in the Black Sea expiring in July 2023, Russian drones began targeting the facilities used for the trade of this resource. In addition to the moral aspect, the objective appears to be the limitation of Ukrainian grain exports. The Russians have a direct economic interest in this, considering that both Russia and Ukraine are among the world's major producers in this field.

Major drone attacks on energy infrastructure are not a novelty. However, the scale at which they are occurring is indeed a distinct feature of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. In September 2019, a combination of drones and cruise missiles, attributed to Houthi forces in Yemen but believed to have originated from Iran, targeted Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil-processing facility and Khurais oilfield. These precision strikes managed to bypass radar detection and the Patriot missile defence system, causing a temporary shutdown of 5.7 million barrels per day in oil production.[12]

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[11] *Ibidem*.

[12] Robin Mills, "Why Drones Pose a New Threat to Critical Energy Infrastructure," *The National*, October 16, 2023, https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/comment/2023/10/16/why-drones-pose-a-new-threat-to-critical-energy-infrastructure/.

Using a similar principle and with relatively limited resources, the Russians have managed to inflict substantial damage. For example, in December 2022, Russian forces utilized dozens of Shahed drones to target energy infrastructure in and around the port city of Odessa.[13] More than 1.5 million people were left without power, as confirmed by Ukrainian officials. A spokesperson for Odesa's regional military administration indicated that the complete restoration of electricity might require up to three months.

On April 8, 2023, the state-owned power grid operator, Ukrenergo, disclosed that Russian forces had employed over 1,200 drones and missiles in their assaults on Ukraine's energy infrastructure since October 2022.[14] These relentless attacks resulted in the loss of many lives and compelled authorities to impose power outages. As indicated in the press release, approximately 250 missiles and drones struck Ukrenergo facilities, contributing to an energy shortfall. Ukrenergo described this period as the most challenging heating season ever for the Ukrainian energy system, with 43% of the energy grid suffering damage.

Although Ukraine faced disruptions as a result of Russian attacks, it managed to withstand the preceding winter. Newly published data from the UN and World Bank in early April shows that Russia's winter offensive against Ukraine's energy sector in 2022-23 resulted in a staggering loss of $10 billion.[15] The consequences were substantial, leading to power and heating outages for as many as 12 million individuals. Moreover, Ukraine's infrastructure has been further weakened due to the previous year's assaults, indicating that the forthcoming winter is likely to be even more challenging.

The situation of the Ukrainian grain infrastructure is at least as challenging, but the impact felt is greater because it has significant international repercussions. In contrast, power supply issues are primarily domestic. Before the war, tens of millions of people, especially in the Middle East and Africa, relied on cheap Ukrainian wheat exported through the Black Sea. In the current context, the supply has become more difficult, and global grain prices have increased.

Russian drones targeted Ukrainian grain facilities at the Izmail port on the Danube River on August 23, 2023. Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov reported that the port's export capacity had been reduced by 15%, resulting in the destruction of 13,000 metric tons of grain. In addition, grain facilities in the Odessa region, located on the Black Sea, were subjected to attacks during the assaults on Ukrainian port infrastructure. Kubrakov noted that the

[13] Mithil Aggarwal, "Drone Strikes Leave More than a Million without Power in Southern Ukraine, Officials Say," NBC News, December 11, 2022, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-ukraine-war-iran-drone-strike-odesa-power-cuts-zelenskyy-putin-rcna61141.

[14] *The Kyiv Independent*, "Ukrenergo: Russia Fired over 1,200 Missiles, Drones at Ukraine's Energy Infrastructure since October," April 8, 2023, https://kyivindependent.com/ukrenergo-russia-has-fired-over-1-200-missiles-drones-at-ukraines-energy-infrastructure-since-october/.

[15] Pavlo Petrov, "Damage to Ukraine's Power, Gas, and Heating Infrastructure Exceeds $10 Billion, According to New Assessment by UN Development Programme and World Bank," n.d., https://www.undp.org/ukraine/press-releases/damage-ukraines-power-gas-and-heating-infrastructure-exceeds-10-billion-according-new-assessment-un-development-programme-and.

destroyed grain had been intended for the Middle East, bringing the total amount of grain lost in these attacks to 270,000 tons since Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea grain deal.[16]

The Danube River has become more significant during the Ukraine conflict. However, it can only provide an alternative for up to 50% of Odessa port's capacity, mainly because of its shallower waterway.

Open-Source Information and its Disruption

In summary of the preceding ideas, it can be affirmed that drones embody the paramount capability for a contemporary military in the current century. Cruise missiles, tanks, artillery, and aircraft are also highly important; however, considering their disadvantages, such as high production costs and lengthy manufacturing times, it becomes evident that inexpensive drones are the weapons with the greatest impact on the battlefield, even though their losses are nearly total due to anti-aircraft and electronic warfare systems.

The achievements of the Ukrainians since the onset of the war are mainly credited to their superior drone capabilities in both quality and quantity. These devices have been effectively used in combination with artillery, aviation, armoured units, and infantry. Ukrainian combined attacks have managed to decimate the columns of Russian armoured vehicles, which initially attempted blitzkrieg-style operations, advancing without the necessary supporting elements, such as anti-air defences.

The adoption of commercial drones at the level of basic tactical units, such as squads or platoons, proved to be a winning decision with strategic implications across the entire front. Until the rigid Russian command structure, a legacy of Soviet mindset, managed to adapt and break away from its previous tactics, the Ukrainian armed forces were able to regain 40% of the territory that the Russians had occupied in the early part of 2022. The blitzkrieg-style warfare had failed, necessitating a strategic rethink by the Russian command.

The Ukrainians managed to reclaim a significant portion of the areas initially captured because the Russians realized that not only were their soldiers too scattered to form effective fighting units, but the number of anti-aircraft and electronic warfare equipment was insufficient to counter the decimation of Russian forces, primarily facilitated by reconnaissance, attack or kamikaze drones.

Another new aspect of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is the vast amount of open-source information, which is disseminated predominantly through digital communication channels like Telegram or Twitter (the current X). The fact that drones represent the most significant military capability at present, with the best cost-to-benefit ratio among current categories of weaponry, is proved by the statistical data derived from the information provided by various groups or individuals who meticulously track the images posted on the internet by soldiers from both sides. This activity of demonstrating the potential for inflicting damage on the opposing side is endorsed by the commanders because it essentially constitutes a

[16] Pavel Polityuk, "Russia Hits Grain Facilities at Ukrainian Danube River Port," Reuters, August 23, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-attacks-grain-facilities-ukraines-danube-region-military-2023-08-23/.

component of informational and psychological warfare. Through this, both sides aim to persuade the public that they hold the advantage and are prevailing in the conflict.

The data released by the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence regarding Russian losses in Ukraine are not highly credible,[17] as there is a high probability that the estimates may be inflated for propagandistic purposes to boost the morale of their own troops. In this context, media accounts that track losses from both sides are an extremely valuable source for the international public seeking information about the front-line situation, even though not all losses can be recorded. This provides a more realistic perspective on the war for the public, considering that the Ukrainian Armed Forces claim to have inflicted colossal losses on the Russians, yet they have made only modest progress in the summer of 2023. In the traditional media, expectations were that Western-donated tanks to Ukraine would break the southern front and not halt until reaching Mariupol.

To be more specific, the lists provided to the public by the Twitter channels Oryx and Warspotting indicate that the Russians have lost until October 2023 between 2300 to 2500 tanks, between 4000 and 4100 infantry fighting vehicles, and around 800 to 900 artillery pieces.[18]

The Drone Army channel claims that, according to their data, half of the artillery pieces and one-third of Russian armoured vehicles have been taken out of action with the help of FPV drones. Andrew Perpetua runs a channel where he posts daily equipment losses observed in various videos, mentioning the cause of destruction alongside a link to the footage for the audience to assess on their own. When the data from Andrew's daily tables made available to the public are analysed, it appears that at least 50% of military equipment losses are directly attributed to FPV and kamikaze drones. If we consider the contribution of surveillance drones to losses inflicted on the enemy by artillery and missile fire the total contribution of drones to the war effort increases to at least 75%.

Although they have experienced significant tactical failures, the Russian military should be credited for their accomplishments. For example, their investment in electronic warfare equipment has been a winning bet, as it represents a strategic capability for modern warfare. If Russia had not developed this sector extensively, the current front in Ukraine would have looked vastly different, given the quantity of commercial drones that the Ukrainian forces lost in the summer of 2023 due to Russian electronic warfare equipment.[19]

Russia's electronic warfare capacity, known as "radio elektronnaya bor'ba," has grown into a crucial combat support element in its conventional Armed Forces. The General Staff's goal in creating "force multipliers" was to mitigate weaknesses when confronting technologically advanced adversaries. From 2009 to 2011, in the period of the military reform

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[17] Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, https://www.mil.gov.ua/en.

[18] Oryx, "Attack On Europe: Documenting Russian Equipment Losses During the Russian Invasion of Ukraine," n.d., https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/02/attack-on-europe-documenting-equipment.html.

[19] Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "Dumb and Cheap: When Facing Electronic Warfare in Ukraine, Small Drones' Quantity Is Quality," *Breaking Defence (blog),* June 13, 2023, https://breakingdefence.sites.breakingmedia.com/2023/06/dumb-and-cheap-when-facing-electronic-warfare-in-ukraine-small-drones-quantity-is-quality/.

launched after the conflict with Georgia, Russia undertook a reassessment of the combat role of electronic warfare.[20]

Shifting from a divisional system to a more comprehensive one, manoeuvre brigades were restructured to incorporate an electronic warfare (EW) unit as an integral component of their structure. This highlights a significant feature of the Russian Ground Forces. Western military forces do not include electronic warfare components as integral parts of their brigade structure. Later, the restructuring of electronic warfare (EW) units within the Russian military has evolved from scattered units at various levels to the organisation of EW brigades. Currently, Russia has five EW brigades distributed across its Military districts. The most potent EW systems of these Russian units, including the Leer-3, Krasukha and Murmansk-BN, offer coverage over several hundred kilometres. The primary mission of these brigades is to provide combat support and they can be subdivided into smaller components based on the specific mission they are assigned.

As per the RUSI report from May 2023, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation placed roughly one significant electronic warfare system for every 10 kilometres along the frontline.[21] Typically, these systems are primarily geared toward managing and neutralizing unmanned aerial vehicles. The Russian military has made substantial efforts to incorporate EW systems into units at all hierarchical levels, equipping each platoon with counter-unmanned aerial systems capabilities.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the disadvantages of electronic warfare equipment to avoid the misconception that they are a universal solution against drones. First and foremost, electronic warfare equipment requires frequent updates and modernization due to the rapid evolution of the electronic communications field. Another challenge is the extended production time and the high cost, especially for equipment designed for strategic-level operations. The *RUSI* report from 2022 suggests that UAVs equipped with seekers capable of targeting EW assets are something mandatory for every military.[22] Russian forces can counter such UAVs by deactivating their EW equipment and changing their positions, but in that case, manoeuvre units would be left without support against thousands of commercial drones.

Conclusion

The relevance of presenting these aspects related to the role of aerial and maritime drones on the modern battlefield is closely tied to the speed at which new techniques are adopted in other regions of the world to gain a significant advantage over the opposing side. As mentioned in the introduction, current military strategies are profoundly influenced (or should be) by the way the war in Ukraine is evolving. Drones pose a genuine challenge to conventional armed forces, critical infrastructure, and the future of maritime trade routes.

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[20] Roger N. McDermott, "Russia's Electronic Warfare Capabilities to 2025: Challenging NATO in the Electromagnetic Spectrum," International Centre for Defence and Security, Estonia, September 2017, pp. 5-7.
[21] Watling and Reynolds, *art. cit*., p. 18.
[22] Greg Waldron, "Russia Poses Tough EW Problem for Ukrainian UAVs: RUSI," *Flight Global*, July 7, 2022, https://www.flightglobal.com/military-uavs/russia-poses-tough-ew-problem-for-ukrainian-uavs-rusi/149311.article.

There are several means to limit the destructive potential of drones, but they should be used in a complementary manner to maximize the success rate. Anti-aircraft missiles are an extremely costly solution, whether we're talking about short-range ones (costing over 100,000 US dollars per unit) or long-range ones (each PAC-3 missile is priced at 4 million per unit) to shoot down drones that cost a few thousand dollars at most. It would be preferable to use these assets against higher-value targets, such as aircraft or ballistic missiles.

Electronic warfare equipment is an effective option against drones, but it has its shortcomings and cannot operate at maximum efficiency without the support of other supporting units. Ukraine has managed to use anti-aircraft gun systems with 35mm ammunition with satisfactory success against Shaded drones attacking critical Ukrainian infrastructure. Systems like Gepard[23] use much cheaper ammunition than missile-based anti-aircraft systems, but the issue with these devices is that their range is limited to approximately 4 km. A novelty for such anti-aircraft systems will be the widespread implementation of programmable munitions with dispersion payloads. For example, The Oerlikon Ahead ammunition can effectively neutralize a broad spectrum of existing aerial threats, regardless of the time of day or weather conditions. It provides cannon-based air defence systems with a significant advantage in countering swift and compact targets while maintaining its effectiveness against traditional airborne threats. The Ahead concept employs a programmable time fuse within each round to release its sub-projectile payload slightly in front of the target.

Another solution for countering the drone threat will be the widespread deployment of anti-aircraft laser weapons, which are still in testing phases. With an extremely low cost per shot, just a few dollars, and the ability to engage multiple targets in a short amount of time, it will represent a fundamental capability for the defence of modern armed forces. For instance, the Israeli IRON BEAM system, a 100kW class High Energy Laser Weapon System, is expected to be the first operational system in its category. However, it reintroduces the limitation of a short range of a few kilometres, and there's also criticism that the performance of such systems will be significantly affected by weather conditions. If it's rainy and cloudy, the system's effectiveness will be reduced.

The Russian and Ukrainian armies have reached a technological equilibrium where the front has become predominantly static, and the war has, for the moment, lost its manoeuvre character, evolving mostly into one of attrition. Both armies have shown the ability to learn from their own mistakes and adopt techniques used by the adversary. This suggests that the war is unlikely to conclude soon, regardless of the enthusiasm displayed by Western leaders in the media. Eastern European countries and beyond should allocate more resources to effectively counter current threats, such as drones, as over time, the risks posed by them will only increase.

In addition to the limited number of self-propelled anti-aircraft weapons and the lasers that have not yet reached mass production levels, a significant disadvantage for Western armies, as well as non-aligned states in proximity to Russia, is the absence of organic battalion

[23] Bohdan Tuzov, "Germany's Gepards: All You Need to Know," *Kyiv Post*, December 31, 2023, https://www.kyivpost.com/post/26065.

or brigade level EW units. The United States did not allocate resources for such units because they believed that after the fall of the USSR, they would only be facing inferior adversaries. This decision has proven to be a strategic mistake. Not necessarily because the United States needed them, but rather to set an example for other allied countries. Most Western armed forces consider the U.S. military as a benchmark for performance and assess their own capabilities in relation to the decisions made by American forces.

The case of Israel is illustrative of the implications that the war in Ukraine has on the way contemporary conflicts are conducted. The Israel Defence Forces did not act pre-emptively in response to the lessons observed on the Ukrainian front and did not take adequate measures against the threat posed by commercial drones. The attack carried out by Hamas on 7th of October included a significant component based on surveillance, kamikaze or FPV drones which launched explosive devices at Israeli armoured vehicles and defensive positions.[24] Israel possesses effective Electronic Warfare equipment but lacks large organic units of this type. If such units had existed and were positioned near Gaza, they would have significantly affected the performance of drones launched by Hamas. Additionally, they would have disrupted the coordination of actions among militant groups, as it would have limited communication between combat units and made reconnaissance missions using drones much more challenging.

In conclusion, the eastern neighbourhood of the European Union is where modern warfare is being rewritten. Depending on the developments in this region, EU countries should adapt their defence plans, which have focused on a qualitative approach to military equipment in recent decades, emphasizing expensive precision equipment to compensate for the cost. However, in an era where technology has become so affordable that non-state groups manage to create tactical capabilities that would normally be the domain of wealthy nations with robust air forces, there is a need for a doctrine rethink. The attrition warfare to which the conflict in Ukraine has evolved further underscores this need, where quantity essentially becomes quality. Saturating the enemy's capabilities with relatively inexpensive weapons (which seems to be a necessity in today's wars) recalls the way the Soviet Union believed it could defeat NATO forces: by using as many inexpensive weapons as possible until the adversary depletes all its ammunition and expensive military equipment, ensuring that, in the end, victory belongs to the side that bet on simplicity and perseverance. As things stand, this military approach is being reinvented in the Black Sea region, but instead of cheap Soviet tanks, IFVs and artillery the focus is now on drones.

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Schrodinger's Drone: The Spark that Lit the Flame Concerning EU's Eastern Border Security Implications

Petra Naghi-Comșa

Abstract. The incident on September 4, 2023, along with the inability of Romanian authorities to properly manage a crisis, highlight the need of efforts to create a sense of community at the European level, especially among the Eastern border, to prevent the spread of populist narratives and instil trust between citizens and national authorities. Rising polarization among EU voters is driven by the dispute between supporters of a cohesive EU vision and those condemning it due to its inability to fully integrate baseline differences between the Member States. The European Union faces internal and external pressures, aspects analysed through socioeconomic as well as cultural dimensions in order to fully grasp the motivations behind the emerging radical right parties across Europe.

Keywords: war in Ukraine, drones, Romania, security, Black Sea Region

Following the September 4th of 2023 Russian attacks on the Ismail port, a fragment of a drone had fallen on Romanian territory. National authorities completely denied the information, despite the fact that a direct dialogue with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, has been engaged in order to establish the truth of the matter by relying on existent video and physical proof of the event. The Minister of Defence, Angel Tîlvăr, as well as the President, Klaus Iohannis, denied the reports and actively chose to follow the dangerous narrative for two entire days, in a futile effort of keeping the national civil consensus unalarmed, strategy which ultimately and paradoxically proved to establish precisely the opposite of the desired effect. The actuality of the fragments of the drones has been addressed during a summit in Bucharest, demonstrating the lack of accountability and the ineptitude of the national authorities. This occurrence, irrelevant as it may seem on the spot, underlines the appalling inadequacy of crisis management on behalf of Romania, a European Member State that already suffers from the significant scantiness of trust that the population grants to authorities (less than 25%).[1] In turn, the institutional issues that plague Romania contribute to further deepening the cleavage between the European Union standards of transparency and the current national abuses of power, split which heavily affects the general opinion and engenders the ideal political environment in which populist narratives can emerge and offers the far-right parties an opportunity to strike. The 4th of September incident conveys a clear message that efforts must be channelled towards creating a solid sense of community at the European level, especially among the Eastern border, in order to stop the future potential spread of narratives that jeopardize democratic values and find means of instilling a sense of

[1] Statista, "Trust that Romanians Have in Their Institutions 2021," June 12, 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1101030/trust-in-romanian-institutions/.

trust between the citizens and their national authorities, keeping in mind the approaching European Parliamentary election, preceded and followed by local ones. The aforementioned risks beg the questions: to which extent do the current national political contexts within the Eastern Member States affect the way in which the European Union is perceived by the population and does Russia's aggression represent a threat to the European Parliament's efforts of deepening the integration?

In order to be able to analyse the motives behind the disquiet of the European peoples, and the anxieties that play a part in generating the ongoing security gaps, a relevant methodological tool must be added to the research, namely the notion of 'ontological security', operationalized by Anthony Giddens.[2] Not only does the concept bring further insight into the ways in which the perceptions of repeated nationalist narratives corrode the European values from within, but it also highlights the role that these discourses play in outlining citizens' future political choices. The term is understood as "a sense of continuity and order in events" or "security as being", usually referring to an individuals' cumulated experiences that allows them to assign meaning to their lives, therefore creating a stable general condition, which gives way to properly perceiving what is to follow, security that is relevant precisely due to motivating citizens' votes and their emotional affiliations with certain parties. Ergo, it translates to predictability in relation to the international context, that sequentially engenders the need for stable social identities when confronted with critical situations, such as the outbreak of violence in Ukraine, that might erode a state's or a union's ideals, motivations and even identity. Rising polarization among EU voters, in the context of potential future integration and of expanding the duties of soft law in the Eastern border, has been generated through the dispute between supporters of a more cohesive vision of the EU and the opposite group supporting the idea of Europe based on the subservient and constricted nature of the integration, especially observed through the lenses of globalization and its downsides (homogenization of cultures), an alleged threat to the nationalist agendas. Ontologically, the European Union, and its institutions, perceives itself as the solution to the ongoing conflicts happening in proximity to its Eastern part, while Russia portrays itself as the alternative actor that could support the conservative narrative through contesting the European principles by immersing media outlets with blatant disinformation, that ultimately performs as an identitary retreat for the rising far-right supporters within the Eastern, but not limited to, nations of Europe. Given the simultaneous existence of these two contradicting realities, EU seems to be caught up in an ambush of pressures, internal as well as external, unable to answer promptly enough. The comparison between the two narratives, coupled with EU's perceived inability to exert enough influence in the neighbourhood and Putin's admired manoeuvrings, threaten to further undermine the Union internally. The anti-EU sentiment within the Union has been fed throughout the years by the

[2] Giorgio Shani, "Human Security as Ontological Security: A Post-Colonial Approach," *Postcolonial Studies* vol. 20, no. 3/July 3, 2017, pp. 275–93, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2017.1378062.

steady rise of populist rhetoric and a sense of democratic deficit, that combined have decreased solidarity between the Member States.[3]

There are several factors that influenced the way in which radical right parties reacted to the war in Ukraine, elements that can be categorized in internal and external points of pressure that prompted a certain way of action.[4] Internally, the main difference between the responses of these parties has been created by the ideological boundaries in relation to the domestic socioeconomic and cultural aspects of the specific origin Member State. This correlation can be traced back to the interest of the parties in employing speech that highlighted the economic dimension of the war that could potentially affect the interests of "their" people through Europe's direct responses and sanctions, and the indelible need of domestic heterogeneity as a mean of protecting the cultural elements of their national identities against an inevitable wave of immigrants. Externally, the previous state-specific foreign policy traditions come at play, each states' level of dependence on Russia's gas and oil supplies serving as a motivating factor, particularly considering that before the war more than half of the European Union's gas supplies were provided by Russia.[5] A relevant example that portrays the deep-rooted dependence on Russian gas, economic reality resorted to as a political tool in the advantage of populist leaders, are Viktor Orbán's actions: the politician has morphed the negotiations for oil with Vladimir Putin, even after the war has started, into personal (and national) superiority.

Another possible security gap present in the recent years has been EU's struggle to provide its Eastern states is a clear orientation for their future affairs within and with the Union, paired with lack of investments in the elaboration of politically advantageous policies. The future of Europe as a geopolitical actor is inextricably connected to the outcome of the effective Eastern incorporation. Fear within Europe has been set in motion by the aggressiveness of Russia, lack of social cohesion and the energy crisis interlinked with the economic one. The military invasion of Ukraine represents a warning that prior policies on Russia were incompatible with the true nature of the events and lacked pre-emptive sight, particularly in light of the feeble sanctions applied during the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Russia's current aggressive actions emphasize the need of promptly engaging in a more articulated and pragmatic strategy towards the Eastern nations on behalf of the European Union, primarily towards the most democratically unstable ones (such as Hungary). Russia still considers the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine) a buffer zone that must perform the function of protecting the Kremlin from supposed insecurities posed by the West, alike NATO accession or the pursuit of closer ties with the European Union. "Policy change will occur by default rather than by design",[6]

[3] Christopher S. Browning, "Geostrategies, Geopolitics and Ontological Security in the Eastern Neighbourhood: The European Union and the 'New Cold War'," *Political Geography* vol. 62/January 2018, pp. 106–15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.10.009.

[4] Ibidem, p. 372.

[5] Gilles Ivaldi, Emilia Zankina, "The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-Wing Populism in Europe," Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po (Sciences Po, CNRS), Temple University Rome, 2023.

[6] Andrew Wilson, "Russia and Its Post-soviet 'Frenemies. Breaking Free from the Post-soviet Time loop?," European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2020.

fuelled by either a power transition crisis or economic troubles that may temporarily side-track Russia's capacity to exert power in the region. Moreover, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine have deep-seated constituencies of pro-Europeans and pro-Russians, signalling the vital role of civil society groups in the context of bringing reform about, furthermore, striving towards sustainable institutional change. These aspects combined emphasize the dire need to take precautionary action in the countries at the boarder of the European Union, combined with proactive measures within its Eastern neighbours.

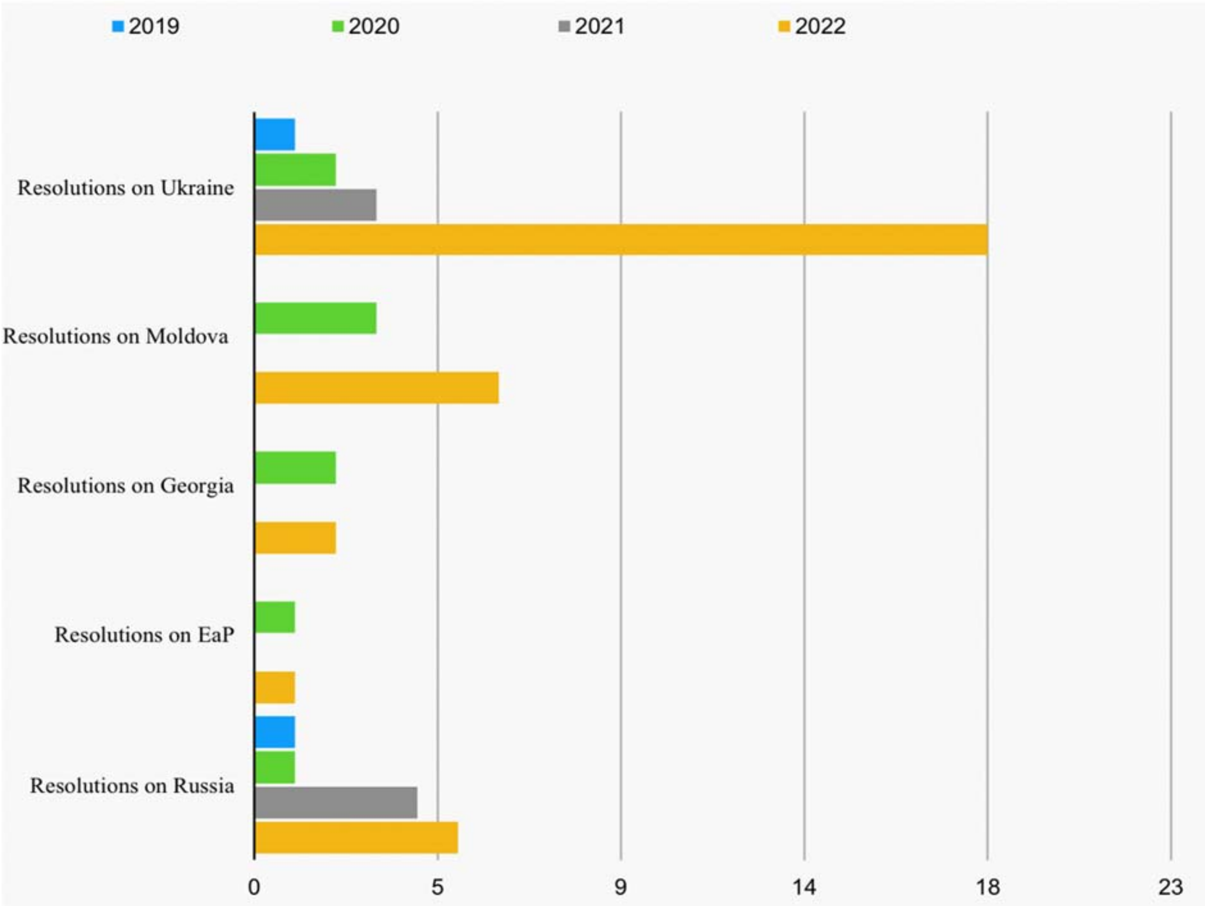


Figure 1: European Parliament Resolutions on the Association Trio, the Eastern Partnership and Russia in the years 2019-2022[7]

The Russian aggression morphed into a significant trigger regarding EU's aims to reassess the policies of its Eastern dimension. Debates among EU institutions have been heavily affected by the current and significant security issues concerning the enlargement process, particularly since the populations of the most vulnerable countries in the shadow of Russia's aggression have deeply divided positions in their electorates. These factors contribute to the increase of intensity in the discourse of the European Parliament regarding the Eastern integration, in addition to its position as an institutional entity that purports to elaborate key aspects of the enlargement policy. However, is the European Parliament ready to shift from a

[7] Vadym Zheltovskyy, "The European Parliament as Transformational Actor toward the Reconsideration of the EU Eastern Policy," *Politics in Central Europe* vol. 18, no. 4/December 1, 2022, pp. 661–79, https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2022-0027, p. 671.

transactional approach to a transformational one? An analysis of the recommendations and resolutions issued since 24 February 2022 onward illustrates a significant and positive change in the perception of Eastern enlargement and qualifies the institution as a key transformational component of the Union's system. The EU is urged through the European Parliament to utilize its potential in the Eastern border by actively setting aside the transactional leadership model of the Council of Europe, High Representative and European Commission and in turn engage in elaborating a concise strategy.

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"Let me from the outset commend the Faculty of European Studies of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, and Professor Naumescu for this timely initiative. This conference takes place at the most appropriate moment as, with a new Administration in Washington, the decision-makers on both sides of the Atlantic are currently working diligently on renewing and strengthening the transatlantic partnership. We, in the EU, are encouraged by the positive signals received from Washington so far, and feel determined to continue our efforts in favor of giving a new impetus to the transatlantic relationship."

H.E. Klaus Werner Iohannis, the President of Romania
(EUXGLOB I, April 2021)

"I am very enthusiastic to attend this event and I will join President Iohannis in commending Professor Naumescu and the organizers for the substantial first edition of this annual conference. I am confident that this event will become a well-acknowledged landmark in addressing the most salient issues of international relations."

Professor **Bogdan Aurescu**, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania
(EUXGLOB I, April 2021)

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